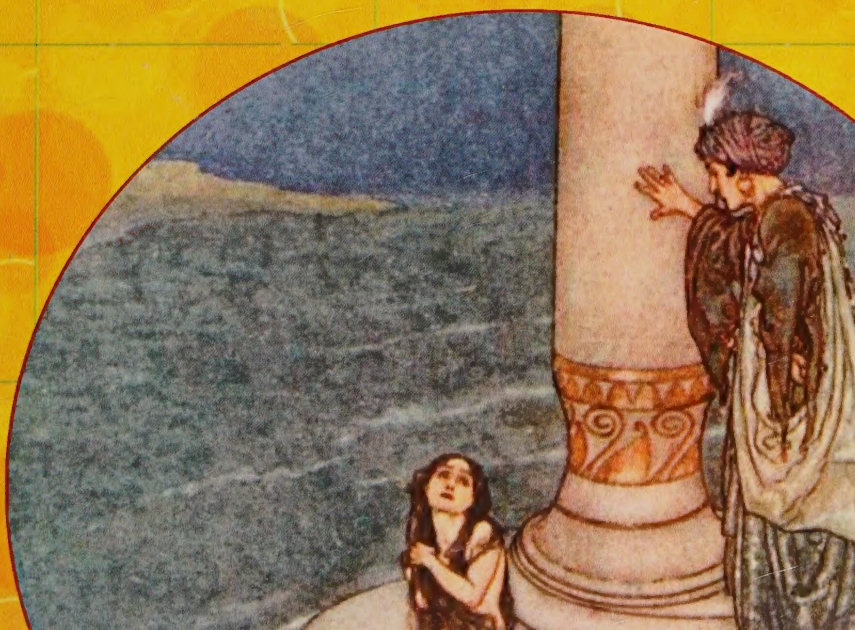
Mermaid Tales for Kids

Seven Magical Fairy Stories About Mermaids for Children



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Seven Magical Fairy Stories About Mermaids for Children

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Petra Books

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CONTENTS

1.	The Mermaid of Zennor	5
2.	The Mermaid	9
3.	Hans, the Mermaid's Son	42
4.	The Golden Mermaid	56
5.	The Mermaid Wife	66
6.	The Mermaid's Child	81
7.	The Mermaid of Druid Lake	103

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The Mermaid of Zennor

This story is taken from *Legend Land*, by G. Basil Barham.

Carved on one of the pews in the church of Zennor in West Cornwall is a strange figure of a mermaid. Depicted with flowing hair, a mirror in one hand and a comb in the other, the Zennor folk tell a strange story about her.

Years and years ago, they say, a beautiful and richly dressed lady used to attend the church sometimes. Nobody knew where she came from, although her unusual beauty

and her glorious voice caused her to be the subject of discussion throughout the parish.

So attractive was she that half the young men of the village fell in love with her, and one of them, Mathey Trewella, a handsome youth and one of the best singers in the neighbourhood, determined that he would discover who she was.

The beautiful stranger had smiled at him in church one Sunday, and after service he followed her as she walked away towards the cliffs.

Mathey Trewella never returned to Zennor, nor did the lovely stranger ever attend church again.

Years passed by, and Mathey's strange disappearance was almost forgotten when, one Sunday morning, a ship cast anchor off Pendower Cove, near Zennor. The captain of the vessel was sitting idling on the deck when he heard a beautiful voice hailing him from the sea. Looking over the side he saw the mermaid, her long yellow hair floating all around her.

She asked him to be so kind as to pull up his anchor, for it was resting upon the doorway of her house under the sea and she was anxious to get back to Mathey, her husband, and her children.

In alarm, the captain weighed anchor and stood out to sea, for sailors fear that mermaids will bring bad luck. But later he returned and told the Zennor folk of Mathey's fate, and they, to commemorate the strange event, and to warn other young men against the wiles of the merrymaids, had the mermaid figure carved in the church.

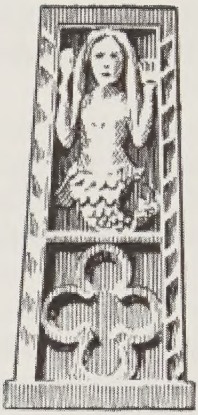
And there it is to-day for all the world to see, and to prove, to those who do not believe the old stories, the truth of poor Mathey Trewella's sad fate.

Zennor is a lovely moorland village in the neighbourhood of some of the wildest scenery in Cornwall. To the south-west rugged moors stretch away to the Land's End. To the north a quarter of an hour's walk brings you to the coast with its sheltered coves and its cruel cliffs. Gurnard's Head, one of the most famous of all Cornish promontories, is less than two miles away. Grim, remote, yet indescribably fascinating, the country around Zennor is typical of that far western corner of England which is swept continually by the great health-giving winds of the Atlantic.

In its sheltered valleys flowers bloom all the year round. On its bold hill-tops, boulder-strewn and wild, there remain still the old mysterious stones and the queer beehive huts erected by men who inhabited this land in the dark days before Christianity.

Gorse and heather riot over the moorland. There is a charm and peace about this too little known country that compels health and well-being.

Yet Zennor is only five and a half miles by the moorland road from St. Ives, that picturesque little fishing town that artists and golfers know so well. St. Ives, less than seven hours' journey from Paddington, is an ideal centre from which to explore the coast and moorland beauties of England's furthest west.



The Mermaid of Zennor: Bench End in Zennor Church

The Mermaid

This story is taken from *Stories From Hans Andersen.*

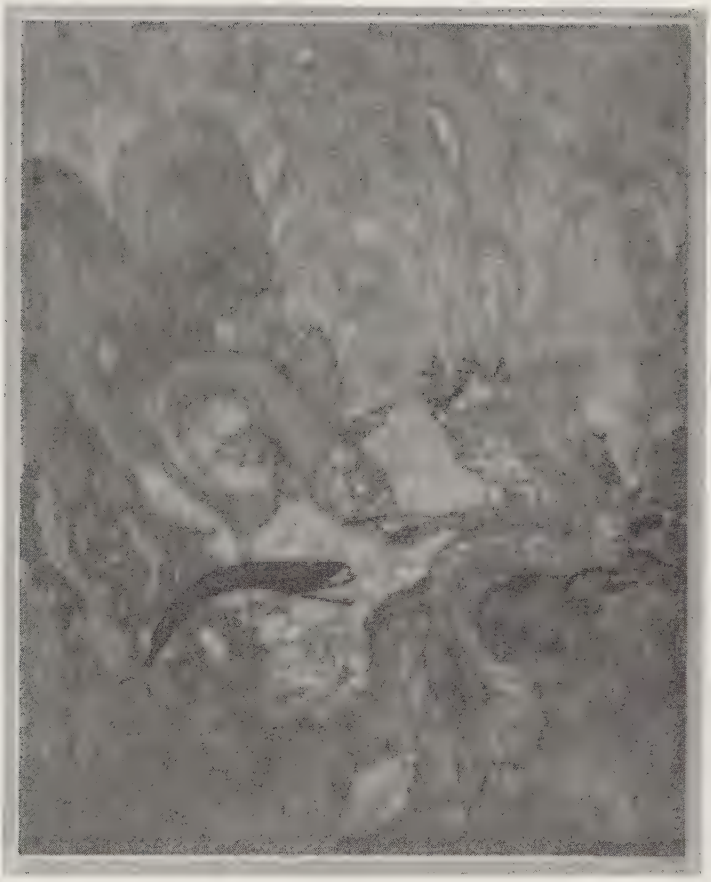
Far out at sea the water is as blue as the bluest cornflower, and as clear as the clearest crystal; but it is very deep, too deep for any cable to fathom, and if many steeples were piled on the top of one another they would not reach from the bed of the sea to the surface of the water. It is down there that the Mermen live.

Now don't imagine that there are only bare white sands at the bottom; oh no! the most wonderful trees and plants grow there, with such flexible stalks and leaves, that at the slightest motion of the water they move just as if they were alive. All the fish, big and little, glide among the branches just as, up here, birds glide through the air. The palace of the Merman King lies in the very deepest part; its walls are of coral and the long pointed windows of the clearest amber, but the roof is made of mussel shells which open and shut with the lapping of the water. This has a lovely effect, for there are gleaming pearls in every shell, any one of which would be the pride of a queen's crown.

The Merman King had been for many years a widower, but his old mother kept house for him; she was a clever woman, but so proud of her noble birth that she wore twelve oysters on her tail, while the other grandees were only allowed six. Otherwise she was worthy of all praise, especially because she was so fond of the little mermaid

princesses, her grandchildren. They were six beautiful children, but the youngest was the prettiest of all; her skin was as soft and delicate as a roseleaf, her eyes as blue as the deepest sea, but like all the others she had no feet, and instead of legs she had a fish's tail.

All the livelong day they used to play in the palace in the great halls, where living flowers grew out of the walls. When the great amber windows were thrown open the fish swam in, just as the swallows fly into our rooms when we open the windows, but the fish swam right up to the little princesses, ate out of their hands, and allowed themselves to be patted.



The Merman King had been for many years a widower, but his old mother kept house for him; she was a clever woman, but so proud of her noble birth that she wore twelve oysters on her tail, while the other grandees were only allowed six.

Outside the palace was a large garden, with fiery red and deep blue trees, the fruit of which shone like gold, while the flowers glowed like fire on their ceaselessly waving stalks. The ground was of the finest sand, but it was of a blue phosphorescent tint. Everything was bathed in a wondrous blue light down there; you might more readily

have supposed yourself to be high up in the air, with only the sky above and below you, than that you were at the bottom of the ocean. In a dead calm you could just catch a glimpse of the sun like a purple flower with a stream of light radiating from its calyx.

Each little princess had her own little plot of garden, where she could dig and plant just as she liked. One made her flower-bed in the shape of a whale; another thought it nice to have hers like a little mermaid; but the youngest made hers quite round like the sun, and she would only have flowers of a rosy hue like its beams. She was a curious child, quiet and thoughtful, and while the other sisters decked out their gardens with all kinds of extraordinary objects which they got from wrecks, she would have nothing besides the rosy flowers like the sun up above, except a statue of a beautiful boy. It was hewn out of the purest white marble and had gone to the bottom from some wreck. By the statue she planted a rosy red weeping willow which grew splendidly, and the fresh delicate branches hung round and over it, till they almost touched the blue sand where the shadows showed violet, and were ever moving like the branches. It looked as if the leaves and the roots were playfully interchanging kisses.

Nothing gave her greater pleasure than to hear about the world of human beings up above; she made her old grandmother tell her all that she knew about ships and towns, people and animals. But above all it seemed strangely beautiful to her that up on the earth the flowers were scented, for they were not so at the bottom of the sea; also that the woods were green, and that the fish which were to be seen among the branches could sing so loudly and sweetly that it was a delight to listen to them. You see the grandmother called little birds fish, or the mermaids

would not have understood her, as they had never seen a bird.

'When you are fifteen,' said the grandmother, 'you will be allowed to rise up from the sea and sit on the rocks in the moonlight, and look at the big ships sailing by, and you will also see woods and towns.'

One of the sisters would be fifteen in the following year, but the others,—well, they were each one year younger than the other, so that the youngest had five whole years to wait before she would be allowed to come up from the bottom, to see what things were like on earth. But each one promised the others to give a full account of all that she had seen, and found most wonderful on the first day. Their grandmother could never tell them enough, for there were so many things about which they wanted information.

None of them was so full of longings as the youngest, the very one who had the longest time to wait, and who was so quiet and dreamy. Many a night she stood by the open windows and looked up through the dark blue water which the fish were lashing with their tails and fins. She could see the moon and the stars, it is true; their light was pale, but they looked much bigger through the water than they do to our eyes. When she saw a dark shadow glide between her and them, she knew that it was either a whale swimming above her, or else a ship laden with human beings. I am certain they never dreamt that a lovely little mermaid was standing down below, stretching up her white hands towards the keel.

The eldest princess had now reached her fifteenth birthday, and was to venture above the water. When she came back she had hundreds of things to tell them, but the most delightful of all, she said, was to lie in the moonlight, on a

sandbank in a calm sea, and to gaze at the large town close to the shore, where the lights twinkled like hundreds of stars; to listen to music and the noise and bustle of carriages and people, to see the many church towers and spires, and to hear the bells ringing; and just because she could not go on shore she longed for that most of all.

Oh, how eagerly the youngest sister listened! and when, later in the evening she stood at the open window and looked up through the dark blue water, she thought of the big town with all its noise and bustle, and fancied that she could even hear the church bells ringing.

The year after, the second sister was allowed to mount up through the water and swim about wherever she liked. The sun was just going down when she reached the surface, the most beautiful sight, she thought, that she had ever seen. The whole sky had looked like gold, she said, and as for the clouds! well, their beauty was beyond description; they floated in red and violet splendour over her head, and, far faster than they went, a flock of wild swans flew like a long white veil over the water towards the setting sun; she swam towards it, but it sank and all the rosy light on clouds and water faded away.

The year after that the third sister went up, and, being much the most venturesome of them all, swam up a broad river which ran into the sea. She saw beautiful green, vine-clad hills; palaces and country seats peeping through splendid woods. She heard the birds singing, and the sun was so hot that she was often obliged to dive, to cool her burning face. In a tiny bay she found a troop of little children running about naked and paddling in the water; she wanted to play with them, but they were frightened and ran away. Then a little black animal came up; it was a dog, but she had never seen one before; it barked so furiously at her that she was

frightened and made for the open sea. She could never forget the beautiful woods, the green hills and the lovely children who could swim in the water although they had no fishes' tails.

The fourth sister was not so brave; she stayed in the remotest part of the ocean, and, according to her account, that was the most beautiful spot. You could see for miles and miles around you, and the sky above was like a great glass dome. She had seen ships, but only far away, so that they looked like sea-gulls. There were grotesque dolphins turning somersaults, and gigantic whales squirting water through their nostrils like hundreds of fountains on every side.

Now the fifth sister's turn came. Her birthday fell in the winter, so that she saw sights that the others had not seen on their first trips. The sea looked quite green, and large icebergs were floating about, each one of which looked like a pearl, she said, but was much bigger than the church towers built by men. They took the most wonderful shapes, and sparkled like diamonds. She had seated herself on one of the largest, and all the passing ships sheered off in alarm when they saw her sitting there with her long hair streaming loose in the wind.

In the evening the sky became overcast with dark clouds; it thundered and lightened, and the huge icebergs glittering in the bright lightning, were lifted high into the air by the black waves. All the ships shortened sail, and there was fear and trembling on every side, but she sat quietly on her floating iceberg watching the blue lightning flash in zigzags down on to the shining sea.

The first time any of the sisters rose above the water she was delighted by the novelties and beauties she saw; but

once grown up, and at liberty to go where she liked, she became indifferent and longed for her home; in the course of a month or so they all said that after all their own home in the deep was best, it was so cosy there.

Many an evening the five sisters interlacing their arms would rise above the water together. They had lovely voices, much clearer than any mortal, and when a storm was rising, and they expected ships to be wrecked, they would sing in the most seductive strains of the wonders of the deep, bidding the seafarers have no fear of them. But the sailors could not understand the words, they thought it was the voice of the storm; nor could it be theirs to see this Elysium of the deep, for when the ship sank they were drowned, and only reached the Merman's palace in death. When the elder sisters rose up in this manner, arm-in-arm, in the evening, the youngest remained behind quite alone, looking after them as if she must weep; but mermaids have no tears, and so they suffer all the more.

'Oh! if I were only fifteen!' she said, 'I know how fond I shall be of the world above, and of the mortals who dwell there.'

At last her fifteenth birthday came.

'Now we shall have you off our hands,' said her grandmother, the old queen-dowager. 'Come now, let me adorn you like your other sisters!' and she put a wreath of white lilies round her hair, but every petal of the flowers was half a pearl; then the old queen had eight oysters fixed on to the princess's tail to show her high rank.

'But it hurts so!' said the little mermaid.

'You must endure the pain for the sake of the finery!' said her grandmother.

But oh! how gladly would she have shaken off all this splendour, and laid aside the heavy wreath. Her red flowers in her garden suited her much better, but she did not dare to make any alteration. 'Good-bye,' she said, and mounted as lightly and airily as a bubble through the water.

The sun had just set when her head rose above the water, but the clouds were still lighted up with a rosy and golden splendour, and the evening star sparkled in the soft pink sky, the air was mild and fresh, and the sea as calm as a millpond. A big three-masted ship lay close by with only a single sail set, for there was not a breath of wind, and the sailors were sitting about the rigging, on the cross-trees, and at the mast-heads. There was music and singing on board, and as the evening closed in hundreds of gaily coloured lanterns were lighted—they looked like the flags of all nations waving in the air. The little mermaid swam right up to the cabin windows, and every time she was lifted by the swell she could see through the transparent panes crowds of gaily dressed people. The handsomest of them all was the young prince with large dark eyes; he could not be much more than sixteen, and all these festivities were in honour of his birthday. The sailors danced on deck, and when the prince appeared among them hundreds of rockets were let off making it as light as day, and frightening the little mermaid so much that she had to dive under the water. She soon ventured up again, and it was just as if all the stars of heaven were falling in showers round about her. She had never seen such magic fires. Great suns whirled round, gorgeous fire-fish hung in the blue air, and all was reflected in the calm and glassy sea. It was so light on board the ship that every little rope could be seen, and the people still better. Oh, how handsome the

prince was! how he laughed and smiled as he greeted his guests, while the music rang out in the quiet night.

It got quite late, but the little mermaid could not take her eyes off the ship and the beautiful prince. The coloured lanterns were put out, no more rockets were sent up, and the cannon had ceased its thunder, but deep down in the sea there was a dull murmuring and moaning sound. Meanwhile she was rocked up and down on the waves, so that she could look into the cabin; but the ship got more and more way on, sail after sail was filled by the wind, the waves grew stronger, great clouds gathered, and it lightened in the distance. Oh, there was going to be a fearful storm! and soon the sailors had to shorten sail. The great ship rocked and rolled as she dashed over the angry sea, the black waves rose like mountains, high enough to overwhelm her, but she dived like a swan through them and rose again and again on their towering crests. The little mermaid thought it a most amusing race, but not so the sailors. The ship creaked and groaned; the mighty timbers bulged and bent under the heavy blows; the water broke over the decks, snapping the main mast like a reed; she heeled over on her side, and the water rushed into the hold.

Now the little mermaid saw that they were in danger, and she had for her own sake to beware of the floating beams and wreckage. One moment it was so pitch dark that she could not see at all, but when the lightning flashed it became so light that she could see all on board. Every man was looking out for his own safety as best he could; but she more particularly followed the young prince with her eyes, and when the ship went down she saw him sink in the deep sea. At first she was quite delighted, for now he was coming to be with her, but then she remembered that human beings could not live under water, and that only if he were dead could he go to her father's palace. No! he

must not die; so she swam towards him all among the drifting beams and planks, quite forgetting that they might crush her. She dived deep down under the water, and came up again through the waves, and at last reached the young prince just as he was becoming unable to swim any further in the stormy sea. His limbs were numbed, his beautiful eyes were closing, and he must have died if the little mermaid had not come to the rescue. She held his head above the water and let the waves drive them whithersoever they would.

By daybreak all the storm was over, of the ship not a trace was to be seen; the sun rose from the water in radiant brilliance, and his rosy beams seemed to cast a glow of life into the prince's cheeks, but his eyes remained closed. The mermaid kissed his fair and lofty brow, and stroked back the dripping hair; it seemed to her that he was like the marble statue in her little garden; she kissed him again and longed that he might live.

At last she saw dry land before her, high blue mountains on whose summits the white snow glistened as if a flock of swans had settled there; down by the shore were beautiful green woods, and in the foreground a church or temple, she did not quite know which, but it was a building of some sort. Lemon and orange trees grew in the garden, and lofty palms stood by the gate. At this point the sea formed a little bay where the water was quite calm, but very deep, right up to the cliffs; at their foot was a strip of fine white sand to which she swam with the beautiful prince, and laid him down on it, taking great care that his head should rest high up in the warm sunshine.

The bells now began to ring in the great white building, and a number of young maidens came into the garden. Then the little mermaid swam further off behind some high rocks

and covered her hair and breast with foam, so that no one should see her little face, and then she watched to see who would discover the poor prince.

His limbs were numbed, his beautiful eyes were closing, and he must have died if the little mermaid had not come to the rescue.

It was not long before one of the maidens came up to him. At first she seemed quite frightened, but only for a moment, and then she fetched several others, and the mermaid saw

that the prince was coming to life, and that he smiled at all those around him, but he never smiled at her. You see he did not know that she had saved him. She felt so sad that when he was led away into the great building she dived sorrowfully into the water and made her way home to her father's palace.

Always silent and thoughtful, she became more so now than ever. Her sisters often asked her what she had seen on her first visit to the surface, but she never would tell them anything.

Many an evening and many a morning she would rise to the place where she had left the prince. She saw the fruit in the garden ripen, and then gathered, she saw the snow melt on the mountain-tops, but she never saw the prince, so she always went home still sadder than before. At home her only consolation was to sit in her little garden with her arms twined round the handsome marble statue which reminded her of the prince. It was all in gloomy shade now, as she had ceased to tend her flowers, and the garden had become a neglected wilderness of long stalks and leaves entangled with the branches of the tree.

At last she could not bear it any longer, so she told one of her sisters, and from her it soon spread to the others, but to no one else except to one or two other mermaids who only told their dearest friends. One of these knew all about the prince; she had also seen the festivities on the ship; she knew where he came from and where his kingdom was situated.

'Come, little sister!' said the other princesses, and, throwing their arms round each other's shoulders, they rose from the water in a long line, just in front of the prince's palace.

It was built of light yellow glistening stone, with great marble staircases, one of which led into the garden. Magnificent gilded cupolas rose above the roof, and the spaces between the columns which encircled the building were filled with life-like marble statues. Through the clear glass of the lofty windows you could see gorgeous halls adorned with costly silken hangings, and the pictures on the walls were a sight worth seeing. In the midst of the central hall a large fountain played, throwing its jets of spray upwards to a glass dome in the roof, through which the sunbeams lighted up the water and the beautiful plants which grew in the great basin.

She knew now where he lived, and often used to go there in the evenings and by night over the water. She swam much nearer the land than any of the others dared; she even ventured right up the narrow channel under the splendid marble terrace which threw a long shadow over the water. She used to sit here looking at the young prince, who thought he was quite alone in the clear moonlight.

She saw him many an evening sailing about in his beautiful boat, with flags waving and music playing; she used to peep through the green rushes, and if the wind happened to catch her long silvery veil and any one saw it, they only thought it was a swan flapping its wings.

Many a night she heard the fishermen, who were fishing by torchlight, talking over the good deeds of the young prince; and she was happy to think that she had saved his life when he was drifting about on the waves, half dead, and she could not forget how closely his head had pressed her breast, and how passionately she had kissed him; but he knew nothing of all this, and never saw her even in his dreams.

She became fonder and fonder of mankind, and longed more and more to be able to live among them; their world seemed so infinitely bigger than hers; with their ships they could scour the ocean, they could ascend the mountains high above the clouds, and their wooded, grass-grown lands extended further than her eye could reach. There was so much that she wanted to know, but her sisters could not give an answer to all her questions, so she asked her old grandmother, who knew the upper world well, and rightly called it the country above the sea.

'If men are not drowned,' asked the little mermaid, 'do they live for ever? Do they not die as we do down here in the sea?'

'Yes,' said the old lady, 'they have to die too, and their lifetime is even shorter than ours. We may live here for three hundred years, but when we cease to exist we become mere foam on the water and do not have so much as a grave among our dear ones. We have no immortal souls; we have no future life; we are just like the green sea-weed, which, once cut down, can never revive again! Men, on the other hand, have a soul which lives for ever, lives after the body has become dust; it rises through the clear air, up to the shining stars! Just as we rise from the water to see the land of mortals, so they rise up to unknown beautiful regions which we shall never see.'

'Why have we no immortal souls?' asked the little mermaid sadly. 'I would give all my three hundred years to be a human being for one day, and afterwards to have a share in the heavenly kingdom.'

'You must not be thinking about that,' said the grandmother; 'we are much better off and happier than human beings.'

'Then I shall have to die and to float as foam on the water, and never hear the music of the waves or see the beautiful flowers or the red sun! Is there nothing I can do to gain an immortal soul?'

'No,' said the grandmother; 'only if a human being so loved you that you were more to him than father or mother, if all his thoughts and all his love were so centred in you that he would let the priest join your hands and would vow to be faithful to you here, and to all eternity; then your body would become infused with his soul. Thus, and only thus, could you gain a share in the felicity of mankind. He would give you a soul while yet keeping his own. But that can never happen! That which is your greatest beauty in the sea, your fish's tail, is thought hideous up on earth, so little do they understand about it; to be pretty there you must have two clumsy supports which they call legs!'

Then the little mermaid sighed and looked sadly at her fish's tail.

'Let us be happy,' said the grandmother; 'we will hop and skip during our three hundred years of life; it is surely a long enough time; and after it is over we shall rest all the better in our graves. There is to be a court ball to-night.'

This was a much more splendid affair than we ever see on earth. The walls and the ceiling of the great ballroom were of thick but transparent glass. Several hundreds of colossal mussel shells, rose red and grass green, were ranged in order round the sides holding blue lights, which illuminated the whole room and shone through the walls, so that the sea outside was quite lit up. You could see countless fish, great and small, swimming towards the glass walls, some with shining scales of crimson hue, while others were golden and silvery. In the middle of the room was a broad stream

of running water, and on this the mermaids and mermen danced to their own beautiful singing. No earthly beings have such lovely voices. The little mermaid sang more sweetly than any of them, and they all applauded her. For a moment she felt glad at heart, for she knew that she had the finest voice either in the sea or on land. But she soon began to think again about the upper world, she could not forget the handsome prince and her sorrow in not possessing, like him, an immortal soul. Therefore she stole out of her father's palace, and while all within was joy and merriment, she sat sadly in her little garden. Suddenly she heard the sound of a horn through the water, and she thought, 'Now he is out sailing up there; he whom I love more than father or mother, he to whom my thoughts cling and to whose hands I am ready to commit the happiness of my life. I will dare anything to win him and to gain an immortal soul! While my sisters are dancing in my father's palace I will go to the sea-witch, of whom I have always been very much afraid; she will perhaps be able to advise and help me!'

Thereupon the little mermaid left the garden and went towards the roaring whirlpools at the back of which the witch lived. She had never been that way before; no flowers grew there, no seaweed, only the bare grey sands, stretched towards the whirlpools, which like rushing mill-wheels swirled round, dragging everything that came within reach down to the depths. She had to pass between these boiling eddies to reach the witch's domain, and for a long way the only path led over warm bubbling mud, which the witch called her 'peat bog.' Her house stood behind this in the midst of a weird forest. All the trees and bushes were polyps, half animal and half plant; they looked like hundred-headed snakes growing out of the sand, the branches were long slimy arms, with tentacles like wriggling worms, every joint of which, from the root to the outermost tip, was in constant motion. They wound

themselves tightly round whatever they could lay hold of and never let it escape. The little mermaid standing outside was quite frightened, her heart beat fast with terror and she nearly turned back, but then she remembered the prince and the immortal soul of mankind and took courage. She bound her long flowing hair tightly round her head, so that the polyps should not seize her by it, folded her hands over her breast, and darted like a fish through the water, in between the hideous polyps, which stretched out their sensitive arms and tentacles towards her. She could see that every one of them had something or other, which they had grasped with their hundred arms, and which they held as if in iron bands. The bleached bones of men who had perished at sea and sunk below peeped forth from the arms of some, while others clutched rudders and sea-chests, or the skeleton of some land animal; and most horrible of all, a little mermaid whom they had caught and suffocated. Then she came to a large opening in the wood where the ground was all slimy, and where some huge fat water snakes were gambolling about. In the middle of this opening was a house built of the bones of the wrecked; there sat the witch, letting a toad eat out of her mouth, just as mortals let a little canary eat sugar. She called the hideous water snakes her little chickens, and allowed them to crawl about on her unsightly bosom.

'I know very well what you have come here for,' said the witch. 'It is very foolish of you! all the same you shall have your way, because it will lead you into misfortune, my fine princess. You want to get rid of your fish's tail, and instead to have two stumps to walk about upon like human beings, so that the young prince may fall in love with you, and that you may win him and an immortal soul.' Saying this, she gave such a loud hideous laugh that the toad and the snakes fell to the ground and wriggled about there.

'You are just in the nick of time,' said the witch; 'after sunrise to-morrow I should not be able to help you until another year had run its course. I will make you a potion, and before sunrise you must swim ashore with it, seat yourself on the beach and drink it; then your tail will divide and shrivel up to what men call beautiful legs. But it hurts; it is as if a sharp sword were running through you. All who see you will say that you are the most beautiful child of man they have ever seen. You will keep your gliding gait, no dancer will rival you, but every step you take will be as if you were treading upon sharp knives, so sharp as to draw blood. If you are willing to suffer all this I am ready to help you!'

'Yes!' said the little princess with a trembling voice, thinking of the prince and of winning an undying soul.

'But remember,' said the witch, 'when once you have received a human form, you can never be a mermaid again; you will never again be able to dive down through the water to your sisters and to your father's palace. And if you do not succeed in winning the prince's love, so that for your sake he will forget father and mother, cleave to you with his whole heart, let the priest join your hands and make you man and wife, you will gain no immortal soul! The first morning after his marriage with another your heart will break, and you will turn into foam of the sea.'

'I will do it,' said the little mermaid as pale as death.

'But you will have to pay me, too,' said the witch, 'and it is no trifle that I demand. You have the most beautiful voice of any at the bottom of the sea, and I daresay that you think you will fascinate him with it; but you must give me that voice; I will have the best you possess in return for my

precious potion! I have to mingle my own blood with it so as to make it as sharp as a two-edged sword.'

'But if you take my voice,' said the little mermaid, 'what have I left?'

'Your beautiful form,' said the witch, 'your gliding gait, and your speaking eyes; with these you ought surely to be able to bewitch a human heart. Well! have you lost courage? Put out your little tongue, and I will cut it off in payment for the powerful draught.'

'Let it be done,' said the little mermaid, and the witch put on her caldron to brew the magic potion. 'There is nothing like cleanliness,' said she, as she scoured the pot with a bundle of snakes; then she punctured her breast and let the black blood drop into the caldron, and the steam took the most weird shapes, enough to frighten any one. Every moment the witch threw new ingredients into the pot, and when it boiled the bubbling was like the sound of crocodiles weeping. At last the potion was ready and it looked like the clearest water.

'There it is,' said the witch, and thereupon she cut off the tongue of the little mermaid, who was dumb now and could neither sing nor speak.

'If the polyps should seize you, when you go back through my wood,' said the witch, 'just drop a single drop of this liquid on them, and their arms and fingers will burst into a thousand pieces.' But the little mermaid had no need to do this, for at the mere sight of the bright liquid, which sparkled in her hand like a shining star, they drew back in terror. So she soon got past the wood, the bog, and the eddying whirlpools.

She saw her father's palace; the lights were all out in the great ballroom, and no doubt all the household was asleep, but she did not dare to go in now that she was dumb and about to leave her home for ever. She felt as if her heart would break with grief. She stole into the garden and plucked a flower from each of her sisters' plots, wafted with her hand countless kisses towards the palace, and then rose up through the dark blue water.

But the little mermaid had no need to do this, for at the mere sight of the bright liquid which sparkled in her hand like a shining star, they drew back in terror.

The sun had not risen when she came in sight of the prince's palace and landed at the beautiful marble steps. The moon was shining bright and clear. The little mermaid drank the burning, stinging draught, and it was like a sharp, two-edged sword running through her tender frame; she fainted away and lay as if she were dead. When the sun rose on the sea she woke up and became conscious of a sharp pang, but just in front of her stood the handsome young prince, fixing his coal black eyes on her; she cast hers down and saw that her fish's tail was gone, and that she had the prettiest little white legs any maiden could desire; but she was quite naked, so she wrapped her long thick hair around her. The prince asked who she was and how she came there. She looked at him tenderly and with a sad expression in her dark blue eyes, but could not speak. Then he took her by the hand and led her into the palace. Every step she took was, as the witch had warned her beforehand, as if she were treading on sharp knives and spikes, but she bore it gladly; led by the prince, she moved as lightly as a bubble, and he and every one else marvelled at her graceful gliding gait.

Clothed in the costliest silks and muslins she was the greatest beauty in the palace, but she was dumb, and could neither sing nor speak. Beautiful slaves clad in silks and gold came forward and sang to the prince and his royal parents; one of them sang better than all the others, and the prince clapped his hands and smiled at her; that made the little mermaid very sad, for she knew that she used to sing far better herself. She thought, 'Oh! if he only knew that for the sake of being with him I had given up my voice for ever!' Now the slaves began to dance, graceful undulating

dances to enchanting music; thereupon the little mermaid, lifting her beautiful white arms and raising herself on tiptoe, glided on the floor with a grace which none of the other dancers had yet attained. With every motion her grace and beauty became more apparent, and her eyes appealed more deeply to the heart than the songs of the slaves. Every one was delighted with it, especially the prince, who called her his little foundling; and she danced on and on, notwithstanding that every time her foot touched the ground it was like treading on sharp knives. The prince said that she should always be near him, and she was allowed to sleep outside his door on a velvet cushion.

He had a man's dress made for her, so that she could ride about with him. They used to ride through scented woods, where the green branches brushed her shoulders, and little birds sang among the fresh leaves. She climbed up the highest mountains with the prince, and although her delicate feet bled so that others saw it, she only laughed and followed him until they saw the clouds sailing below them like a flock of birds, taking flight to distant lands.

The prince asked who she was and how she came there; she looked at him tenderly and with a sad expression in her dark blue eyes, but could not speak.

At home in the prince's palace, when at night the others were asleep, she used to go out on to the marble steps; it cooled her burning feet to stand in the cold sea-water, and at such times she used to think of those she had left in the deep.

One night her sisters came arm in arm; they sang so sorrowfully as they swam on the water that she beckoned to them, and they recognised her, and told her how she had grieved them all. After that they visited her every night, and one night she saw, a long way out, her old grandmother (who for many years had not been above the water), and the Merman King with his crown on his head; they stretched out their hands towards her, but did not venture so close to land as her sisters.

Day by day she became dearer to the prince; he loved her as one loves a good sweet child, but it never entered his head to make her his queen; yet unless she became his wife she would never win an everlasting soul, but on his wedding morning would turn to sea-foam.

'Am I not dearer to you than any of them?' the little mermaid's eyes seemed to say when he took her in his arms and kissed her beautiful brow.

'Yes, you are the dearest one to me,' said the prince, 'for you have the best heart of them all, and you are fondest of me; you are also like a young girl I once saw, but whom I never expect to see again. I was on board a ship which was wrecked; I was driven on shore by the waves close to a holy Temple where several young girls were ministering at a service; the youngest of them found me on the beach and saved my life; I saw her but twice. She was the only person I could love in this world, but you are like her, you almost drive her image out of my heart. She belongs to the holy Temple, and therefore by good fortune you have been sent to me; we will never part!'

'Alas! he does not know that it was I who saved his life,' thought the little mermaid. 'I bore him over the sea to the wood where the Temple stands. I sat behind the foam and

watched to see if any one would come. I saw the pretty girl he loves better than me.' And the mermaid heaved a bitter sigh, for she could not weep.

'The girl belongs to the holy Temple, he has said; she will never return to the world, they will never meet again. I am here with him; I see him every day. Yes! I will tend him, love him, and give up my life to him.'

But now the rumour ran that the prince was to be married to the beautiful daughter of a neighbouring king, and for that reason was fitting out a splendid ship. It was given out that the prince was going on a voyage to see the adjoining countries, but it was without doubt to see the king's daughter; he was to have a great suite with him. But the little mermaid shook her head and laughed; she knew the prince's intentions much better than any of the others. 'I must take this voyage,' he had said to her; 'I must go and see the beautiful princess; my parents demand that, but they will never force me to bring her home as my bride; I can never love her! She will not be like the lovely girl in the Temple whom you resemble. If ever I had to choose a bride it would sooner be you with your speaking eyes, my sweet, dumb foundling!' And he kissed her rosy mouth, played with her long hair, and laid his head upon her heart, which already dreamt of human joys and an immortal soul.

'You are not frightened of the sea, I suppose, my dumb child?' he said, as they stood on the proud ship which was to carry them to the country of the neighbouring king; and he told her about storms and calms, about curious fish in the deep, and the marvels seen by divers; and she smiled at his tales, for she knew all about the bottom of the sea much better than any one else.

At night, in the moonlight, when all were asleep, except the steersman who stood at the helm, she sat at the side of the ship trying to pierce the clear water with her eyes, and fancied she saw her father's palace, and above it her old grandmother with her silver crown on her head, looking up through the cross currents towards the keel of the ship. Then her sisters rose above the water; they gazed sadly at her, wringing their white hands. She beckoned to them, smiled, and was about to tell them that all was going well and happily with her, when the cabin-boy approached, and the sisters dived down, but he supposed that the white objects he had seen were nothing but flakes of foam.

The next morning the ship entered the harbour of the neighbouring king's magnificent city. The church bells rang and trumpets were sounded from every lofty tower, while the soldiers paraded with flags flying and glittering bayonets. There was a *fête* every day, there was a succession of balls, and receptions followed one after the other, but the princess was not yet present; she was being brought up a long way off, in a holy Temple they said, and was learning all the royal virtues. At last she came. The little mermaid stood eager to see her beauty, and she was obliged to confess that a lovelier creature she had never beheld. Her complexion was exquisitely pure and delicate, and her trustful eyes of the deepest blue shone through their dark lashes.

'It is you,' said the prince, 'you who saved me when I lay almost lifeless on the beach?' and he clasped his blushing bride to his heart. 'Oh! I am too happy!' he exclaimed to the little mermaid.

'A greater joy than I had dared to hope for has come to pass. You will rejoice at my joy, for you love me better

than any one.' Then the little mermaid kissed his hand, and felt as if her heart were broken already.

His wedding morn would bring death to her and change her to foam.

All the church bells pealed and heralds rode through the town proclaiming the nuptials. Upon every altar throughout the land fragrant oil was burnt in costly silver lamps. Amidst the swinging of censers by the priests the bride and bridegroom joined hands and received the bishop's blessing. The little mermaid dressed in silk and gold stood holding the bride's train, but her ears were deaf to the festal strains, her eyes saw nothing of the sacred ceremony; she was thinking of her coming death and of all that she had lost in this world.

That same evening the bride and bridegroom embarked, amidst the roar of cannon and the waving of banners. A royal tent of purple and gold softly cushioned was raised amidships where the bridal pair were to repose during the calm cool night.

The sails swelled in the wind and the ship skimmed lightly and almost without motion over the transparent sea.

At dusk lanterns of many colours were lighted and the sailors danced merrily on deck. The little mermaid could not help thinking of the first time she came up from the sea and saw the same splendour and gaiety; and she now threw herself among the dancers, whirling, as a swallow skims through the air when pursued. The onlookers cheered her in amazement, never had she danced so divinely; her delicate feet pained her as if they were cut with knives, but she did not feel it, for the pain at her heart was much sharper. She knew that it was the last night that she would breathe the

same air as he, and would look upon the mighty deep, and the blue starry heavens; an endless night without thought and without dreams awaited her, who neither had a soul, nor could win one. The joy and revelry on board lasted till long past midnight; she went on laughing and dancing with the thought of death all the time in her heart. The prince caressed his lovely bride and she played with his raven locks, and with their arms entwined they retired to the gorgeous tent. All became hushed and still on board the ship, only the steersman stood at the helm; the little mermaid laid her white arms on the gunwale and looked eastwards for the pink-tinted dawn; the first sunbeam, she knew, would be her death. Then she saw her sisters rise from the water; they were as pale as she was; their beautiful long hair no longer floated on the breeze, for it had been cut off.

Once more she looked at the prince, with her eyes already dimmed by death, then dashed overboard and fell, her body dissolving into foam.

'We have given it to the witch to obtain her help, so that you may not die to-night! She has given us a knife; here it is, look how sharp it is! Before the sun rises, you must plunge it into the prince's heart, and when his warm blood sprinkles your feet they will join together and grow into a tail, and you will once more be a mermaid; you will be able to come down into the water to us, and to live out your

three hundred years before you are turned into dead, salt sea-foam. Make haste! you or he must die before sunrise! Our old grandmother is so full of grief that her white hair has fallen off as ours fell under the witch's scissors. Slay the prince and come back to us! Quick! Quick! do you not see the rosy streak in the sky? In a few minutes the sun will rise and then you must die!' saying this they heaved a wondrous deep sigh and sank among the waves.

The little mermaid drew aside the purple curtain from the tent and looked at the beautiful bride asleep with her head on the prince's breast. She bent over him and kissed his fair brow, looked at the sky where the dawn was spreading fast, looked at the sharp knife, and again fixed her eyes on the prince, who, in his dream called his bride by name. Yes! she alone was in his thoughts! For a moment the knife quivered in her grasp, then she threw it far out among the waves, now rosy in the morning light, and where it fell the water bubbled up like drops of blood.

Once more she looked at the prince, with her eyes already dimmed by death, then dashed overboard and fell, her body dissolving into foam.

Now the sun rose from the sea and with its kindly beams warmed the deadly cold foam, so that the little mermaid did not feel the chill of death. She saw the bright sun, and above her floated hundreds of beauteous ethereal beings, through which she could see the white ship and the rosy heavens; their voices were melodious, but so spirit-like that no human ear could hear them, any more than earthly eye could see their forms. Light as bubbles they floated through the air without the aid of wings. The little mermaid perceived that she had a form like theirs; it gradually took shape out of the foam. 'To whom am I coming?' said she, and her voice sounded like that of the other beings, so

unearthly in its beauty that no music of ours could reproduce it.

'To the daughters of the air!' answered the others; 'a mermaid has no undying soul, and can never gain one without winning the love of a human being. Her eternal life must depend upon an unknown power. Nor have the daughters of the air an everlasting soul, but by their own good deeds they may create one for themselves. We fly to the tropics where mankind is the victim of hot and pestilent winds; there we bring cooling breezes. We diffuse the scent of flowers all around, and bring refreshment and healing in our train. When, for three hundred years, we have laboured to do all the good in our power, we gain an undying soul and take a part in the everlasting joys of mankind. You, poor little mermaid, have with your whole heart struggled for the same thing as we have struggled for. You have suffered and endured, raised yourself to the spirit-world of the air, and now, by your own good deeds you may, in the course of three hundred years, work out for yourself an undying soul.'

Then the little mermaid lifted her transparent arms towards God's sun, and for the first time shed tears.

On board ship all was again life and bustle. She saw the prince with his lovely bride searching for her; they looked sadly at the bubbling foam, as if they knew that she had thrown herself into the waves. Unseen she kissed the bride on her brow, smiled at the prince, and rose aloft with the other spirits of the air to the rosy clouds which sailed above.

'In three hundred years we shall thus float into Paradise.'

'We might reach it sooner,' whispered one. 'Unseen we flit into those homes of men where there are children, and for every day that we find a good child who gives pleasure to its parents and deserves their love God shortens our time of probation. The child does not know when we fly through the room, and when we smile with pleasure at it one year of our three hundred is taken away. But if we see a naughty or badly disposed child, we cannot help shedding tears of sorrow, and every tear adds a day to the time of our probation.'

Hans, the Mermaid's Son

Translated from the Danish

This story is taken from *The Pink Fairy Book*, by Andrew Lang.

In a village there once lived a smith called Basmus, who was in a very poor way. He was still a young man, and a strong handsome fellow to boot, but he had many little children and there was little to be earned by his trade. He was, however, a diligent and hard-working man, and when he had no work in the smithy he was out at sea fishing, or gathering wreckage on the shore.

It happened one time that he had gone out to fish in good weather, all alone in a little boat, but he did not come home that day, nor the following one, so that all believed he had perished out at sea. On the third day, however, Basmus came to shore again and had his boat full of fish, so big and fat that no one had ever seen their like. There was nothing the matter with him, and he complained neither of hunger or thirst. He had got into a fog, he said, and could not find land again. What he did not tell, however, was where he had been all the time; that only came out six years later, when people got to know that he had been caught by a mermaid out on the deep sea, and had been her guest during the three days that he was missing. From that time forth he went out no more to fish; nor, indeed, did he require to do so, for whenever he went down to the shore it never failed that some wreckage was washed up, and in it all kinds of valuable things. In those days everyone took what they

found and got leave to keep it, so that the smith grew more prosperous day by day.

When seven years had passed since the smith went out to sea, it happened one morning, as he stood in the smithy, mending a plough, that a handsome young lad came in to him and said, 'Good-day, father; my mother the mermaid sends her greetings, and says that she has had me for six years now, and you can keep me for as long.'

He was a strange enough boy to be six years old, for he looked as if he were eighteen, and was even bigger and stronger than lads commonly are at that age.

'Will you have a bite of bread?' said the smith.

'Oh, yes,' said Hans, for that was his name.

The smith then told his wife to cut a piece of bread for him. She did so, and the boy swallowed it at one mouthful and went out again to the smithy to his father.

'Have you got all you can eat?' said the smith.

'No,' said Hans, 'that was just a little bit.'

The smith went into the house and took a whole loaf, which he cut into two slices and put butter and cheese between them, and this he gave to Hans. In a while the boy came out to the smithy again.

'Well, have you got as much as you can eat?' said the smith.

'No, not nearly,' said Hans; 'I must try to find a better place than this, for I can see that I shall never get my fill here.'

Hans wished to set off at once, as soon as his father would make a staff for him of such a kind as he wanted.

'It must be of iron,' said he, 'and one that can hold out.'

The smith brought him an iron rod as thick as an ordinary staff, but Hans took it and twisted it round his finger, so that wouldn't do. Then the smith came dragging one as thick as a waggon-pole, but Hans bent it over his knee and broke it like a straw. The smith then had to collect all the iron he had, and Hans held it while his father forged for him a staff, which was heavier than the anvil. When Hans had got this he said, 'Many thanks, father; now I have got my inheritance.' With this he set off into the country, and the smith was very pleased to be rid of that son, before he ate him out of house and home.

Hans first arrived at a large estate, and it so happened that the squire himself was standing outside the farmyard.

'Where are you going?' said the squire.

'I am looking for a place,' said Hans, 'where they have need of strong fellows, and can give them plenty to eat.'

'Well,' said the squire, 'I generally have twenty-four men at this time of the year, but I have only twelve just now, so I can easily take you on.'

'Very well,' said Hans, 'I shall easily do twelve men's work, but then I must also have as much to eat as the twelve would.'

All this was agreed to, and the squire took Hans into the kitchen, and told the servant girls that the new man was to have as much food as the other twelve. It was arranged that

he should have a pot to himself, and he could then use the ladle to take his food with.

It was in the evening that Hans arrived there, so he did nothing more that day than eat his supper—a big pot of buck-wheat porridge, which he cleaned to the bottom and was then so far satisfied that he said he could sleep on that, so he went off to bed. He slept both well and long, and all the rest were up and at their work while he was still sleeping soundly. The squire was also on foot, for he was curious to see how the new man would behave who was both to eat and work for twelve.

But as yet there was no Hans to be seen, and the sun was already high in the heavens, so the squire himself went and called on him.

'Get up, Hans,' he cried; 'you are sleeping too long.'

Hans woke up and rubbed his eyes. 'Yes, that's true,' he said, 'I must get up and have my breakfast.'

So he rose and dressed himself, and went into the kitchen, where he got his pot of porridge; he swallowed all of this, and then asked what work he was to have.

He was to thresh that day, said the squire; the other twelve men were already busy at it. There were twelve threshing-floors, and the twelve men were at work on six of them—two on each. Hans must thresh by himself all that was lying upon the other six floors. He went out to the barn and got hold of a flail. Then he looked to see how the others did it and did the same, but at hte first stroke he smashed the flail in pieces. There were several flails hanging there, and Hans took the one after the other, but they all went the same way, every one flying in splinters at the first stroke. He then

looked round for something else to work with, and found a pair of strong beams lying near. Next he caught sight of a horse-hide nailed up on the barn-door. With the beams he made a flail, using the skin to tie them together. The one beam he used as a handle, and the other to strike with, and now that was all right. But the barn was too low, there was no room to swing the flail, and the floors were too small. Hans, however, found a remedy for this—he simply lifted the whole roof off the barn, and set it down in the field beside. He then emptied down all the corn that he could lay his hands on and threshed away. He went through one lot after another, and it was ll the same to him what he got hold of, so before midday he had threshed all the squire's grain, his rye and wheat and barley and oats, all mixed through each other. When he was finished with this, he lifted the roof up on the barn again, like setting a lid on a box, and went in and told the squire that the job was done.

The squire opened his eyes at this announcement; and came out to see if it was really true. It was true, sure enough, but he was scarcely delighted with the mixed grain that he got from all his crops. However, when he saw the flail that Hans had used, and learned how he had made room for himself to swing it, he was so afraid of the strong fellow, that he dared not say anything, except that it was a good thing he had got it threshed; but it had still to be cleaned.

'What does that mean?' asked Hans.

It was explained to him that the corn and the chaff had to be separated; as yet both were lying in one heap, right up to the roof. Hans began to take up a little and sift it in his hands, but he soon saw that this would never do. He soon thought of a plan, however; he opened both barn-doors, and then lay down at one end and blew, so that all the chaff flew out and lay like a sand-bank at the other end of the

barn, and the grain was as clean as it could be. Then he reported to the squire that that job also was done. The squire said that that was well; there was nothing more for him to do that day. Off went Hans to the kitchen, and got as much as he could eat; then he went and took a midday nap which lasted till supper-time.

Meanwhile the squire was quite miserable, and made his moan to his wife, saying that she must help him to find some means to getting rid of this strong fellow, for he durst not give him his leave. She sent for the steward, and it was arranged that next day all the men should go to the forest for fire-wood, and that they should make a bargain among them, that the one who came home last with his load should be hanged. They thought they could easily manage that it would be Hans who would lose his life, for the others would be early on the road, while Hans would certainly oversleep himself. In the evening, therefore, the men sat and talked together, saying that next morning they must set out early to the forest, and as they had a hard day's work and a long journey before them, they would, for their amusement, make a compact, that whichever of them came home last with his load should lose his life on the gallows. So Hans had no objections to make.

Long before the sun was up next morning, all the twelve men were on foot. They took all the best horses and carts, and drove off to the forest. Hans, however, lay and slept on, and the squire said, 'Just let him lie.'

At last, Hans thought it was time to have his breakfast, so he got up and put on his clothes. He took plenty of time to his breakfast, and then went out to get his horse and cart ready. The others had taken everything that was any good, so that he had a difficulty in scraping together four wheels of different sizes and fixing them to an old cart, and he

could find no other horses than a pair of old hacks. He did not know where it lay, but he followed the track of the other carts, and in that way came to it all right. On coming to the gate leading into the forest, he was unfortunate enough to break it in pieces, so he took a huge stone that was lying on the field, seven ells long, and seven ells broad, and set this in the gap, then he went on and joined the others. These laughed at him heartily, for they had laboured as hard as they could since daybreak, and had helped each other to fell trees and put them on the carts, so that all of these were now loaded except one.

Hans got hold of a woodman's axe and proceeded to fell a tree, but he destroyed the edge and broke the shaft at the first blow. He therefore laid down the axe, put his arms round the tree, and pulled it up by the roots. This he threw upon his cart, and then another and another, and thus he went on while all the others forgot their work, and stood with open mouths, gazing at this strange woodcraft. All at once they began to hurry; the last cart was loaded, and they whipped up their horses, so as to be the first to arrive home.

When Hans had finished his work, he again put his old hacks into the cart, but they could not move it from the spot. He was annoyed at this, and took them out again, twisted a rope round the cart, and all the trees, lifted the whole affair on his back, and set off home, leading the horses behind him by the rein. When he reached the gate, he found the whole row of carts standing there, unable to get any further for the stone which lay in the gap.

'What!' said Hans, 'can twelve men not move that stone?' With that he lifted it and threw it out of hte way, and went on with his burden on his back, and the horses behind him, and arrived at the farm long before any of the others. The squire was walking about there, looking and looking, for he

was very curious to know what had happened. Finally, he caught sight of Hans coming along in this fashion, and was so frightened that he did not know what to do, but he shut the gate and put on the bar. When Hans reached the gate of the courtyard, he laid down the trees and hammered at it, but no one came to open it. He then took the trees and tossed them over the barn into the yard, and the cart after them, so that every wheel flew off in a different direction.

When the squire saw this, he thought to himself, 'The horses will come the same way if I don't open the door,' so he did this.

'Good day, master,' said Hans, and put the horses into the stable, and went into the kitchen, to get something to eat. At length the other men came home with their loads. When they came in, Hans said to them, 'Do you remember the bargain we made last night? Which of you is it that's going to be hanged?' 'Oh,' said they, 'that was only a joke; it didn't mean anything.' 'Oh well, it doesn't matter, 'said Hans, and there was no more about it.

The squire, however, and his wife and the steward, had much to say to each other about the terrible man they had got, and all were agreed that they must get rid of him in some way or other. The steward said that he would manage this all right. Next morning they were to clean the well, and they would use of that opportunity. They would get him down into the well, and then have a big mill-stone ready to throw down on top of him—that would settle him. After that they could just fill in the well, and then escape being at any expense for his funeral. Both the squire and his wife thought this a splendid idea, and went about rejoicing at the thought that now they would get rid of Hans.

But Hans was hard to kill, as we shall see. He slept long next morning, as he always did, and finally, as he would not waken by himself, the squire had to go and call him. 'Get up, Hans, you are sleeping too long,' he cried. Hans woke up and rubbed his eyes. 'That's so,' said he, 'I shall rise and have my breakfast.' He got up then and dressed himself, while the breakfast stood waiting for him. When he had finished the whole of this, he asked what he was to do that day. He was told to help the other men to clean out the well. That was all right, and he went out and found the other men waiting for him. To these he said that they could choose whichever task they liked—either to go down into the well and fill the buckets while he pulled them up, or pull them up, and he alone would go down to the bottom of the well. They answered that they would rather stay above-ground, as there would be no room for so many of them down in the well.

Hans therefore went down alone, and began to clean out the well, but the men had arranged how they were to act, and immediately each of them seized a stone from a heap of huge blocks, and threw them down above him, thinking to kill him with these. Hans, however, gave no more heed to this than to shout up to them, to keep the hens away from the well, for they were scraping gravel down on the top of him.

They then saw that they could not kill him with little stones, but they had still the big one left. The whole twelve of them set to work with poles and rollers and rolled the big mill-stone to the brink of the well. It was with the greatest difficulty that they got it thrown down there, and now they had no doubt that he had got all that he wanted. But the stone happened to fall so luckily that his head went right through the hole in the middle of the mill-stone, so that it sat round his neck like a priest's collar. At this, Hans would

stay down no longer. He came out of the well, with the mill-stone round his neck, ad went straight to the squire and complained that the other men were trying to make a fool of him. He would not be their priest, he said; he had too little learning for that. Saying this, he bent down his head and shook the stone off, so that it crushed one of the squire's big toes.

The squire went limping in to his wife, and the steward was sent for. He was told that he must devise some plan for getting rid of this terrible person. The scheme he had devised before had been of no use, and now good counsel was scarce.

'Oh, no' said the steward, 'there are good enough ways yet. The squire can send him this evening to fish in Devilmoss Lake: he will never escape alive from there, for no one can go there by night for Old Eric.'

That was a grand idea, both the squire and his wife thought, and so he limped out again to Hans, and said that he would punish his men for having tried to make a fool of him. Meanwhile, Hans could do a little job where he would be free from these rascals. He should go out on the lake and fish there that night, and would then be free from all work on the following day.

'All right,' said Hans; 'I am well content with that, but I must have something with me to eat—a baking of bread, a cask of butter, a barrel of ale, and a keg of brandy. I can't do with less than that.'

The squire said that he could easily get all that, so Hans got all of these tied up together, hung them over his shoulder on his good staff, and tramped away to Devilmoss Lake.

There he got into the boat, rowed out upon the lake, and got everything ready to fish. As he now lay out there in the middle of the lake, and it was pretty late in the evening, he thought he would have something to eat first, before starting to work. Just as he was at his busiest with this, Old Eric rose out of the lake, caught him by the cuff of the neck, whipped him out of the boat, and dragged him down to the bottom. It was a lucky thing that Hans had his walking-stick with him that day, and had just time to catch hold of it when he felt Old Eric's claws in his neck, so when they got down to the bottom he said, 'Stop now, just wait a little; here is solid ground.' With that he caught Old Eric by the back of the neck with one hand, and hammered away on his back with the staff, till he beat him out as flat as a pancake. Old Eric then began to lament and howl, begging him just to let him go, and he would never come back to the lake again.

'No, my good fellow,' said Hans, 'you won't get off until you promise to bring all the fish in the lake up to the squire's courtyard, before to-morrow morning.'

Old Eric eagerly promised this, if Hans would only let him go; so Hans rowed ashore, ate up the rest of his provisions, and went home to bed.

Next morning, when the squire rose and opened his front door, the fish came tumbling into the porch, and the whole yard was crammed full of them. He ran in again to his wife, for he could never devise anything himself, and said to her, 'What shall we do with him now? Old Eric hasn't taken him. I am certain that all the fish are out of the lake, for the yard is just filled with them.'

'Yes, that's a bad business,' said she; 'you must see if you can't get him sent to Purgatory, to demand tribute.' The

squire therefore made his way to the men's quarters, to speak to Hans, and it took him all his time to push his way along the walls, under the eaves, on account of the fish that filled the yard. He thanked Hans for having fished so well, and said that now he had an errand for him, which he could only give to a trusty servant, and that was to journey to Purgatory, and demand three years tribute, which, he said, was owing to him from that quarter.

'Willingly,' said Hans; 'but what road do I go, to get there?'

The squire stood, and did not know what to say, and had first to go in to his wife to ask her.

'Oh, what a fool you are!' said she, 'can't you direct him straight forward, south through the wood? Whether he gets there or not, we shall be quit of him.'

Out goes the squire again to Hans.

'The way lies straight forward, south through the wood,' said he.

Hans then must have his provisions for the journey; two bakings of bread, two casks of butter, two barrels of ale, and two kegs of brandy. He tied all these up together, and got them on his shoulder hanging on his good walking-stick, and off he tramped southward.

After he had got through the wood, there was more than one road, and he was in doubt which of them was the right one, so he sat down and opened up his bundle of provisions. He found he had left his knife at home, but by good chance, there was a plough lying close at hand, so he took the coulter of this to cut the bread with. As he sat there and took his bite, a man came riding past him.

'Where are you from?' said Hans.

'From Purgatory,' said the man.

'Then stop and wait a little,' said Hans; but the man was in a hurry, and would not stop, so Hans ran after him and caught the horse by the tail. This brought it down on its hind legs, and the man went flying over its head into a ditch. 'Just wait a little,' said Hans; 'I am going the same way.' He got his provisions tied up again, and laid them on the horse's back; then he took hold of the reins and said to the man, 'We two can go along together on foot.'

As they went on their way Hans told the stranger both about the errand he had on hand and the fun he had had with Old Eric. The other said but little but he was well acquainted with the way, and it was no long time before they arrived at the gate. There both horse and rider disappeared, and Hans was left alone outside. 'They will come and let me in presently,' he thought to himself; but no one came. He hammered at the gate; still no one appeared. Then he got tired of waiting, and smashed at the gate with his staff until he knocked it in pieces and got inside. A whole troop of little demons came down upon him and asked what he wanted. His master's compliments, said Hans, and he wanted three years' tribute. At this they howled at him, and were about to lay hold of him and drag him off; but when they had got some raps from his walking-stick they let go again, howled still louder than before, and ran in to Old Eric, who was still in bed, after his adventure in the lake. They told him that a messenger had come from the squire at Devilmoss to demand three years' tribute. He had knocked the gate to pieces and bruised their arms and legs with his iron staff.

'Give him three years'! give him ten!' shouted Old Eric, 'only don't let him come near me.'

So all the little demons came dragging so much silver and gold that it was something awful. Hans filled his bundle with gold and silver coins, put it on his neck, and tramped back to his master, who was scared beyond all measure at seeing him again.

But Hans was also tired of service now. Of all the gold and silver he brought with him he let the squire keep one half, and he was glad enough, both for the money and at getting rid of Hans. The other half he took home to his father the smith in Furreby. To him also he said, 'Farewell;' he was now tired of living on shore among mortal men, and preferred to go home again to his mother. Since that time no one has ever seen Hans, the Mermaid's son.

The Golden Mermaid

This story is taken from *The Green Fairy Book*, by Andrew Lang.

A powerful king had, among many other treasures, a wonderful tree in his garden, which bore every year beautiful golden apples. But the King was never able to enjoy his treasure, for he might watch and guard them as he liked, as soon as they began to get ripe they were always stolen. At last, in despair, he sent for his three sons, and said to the two eldest, 'Get yourselves ready for a journey. Take gold and silver with you, and a large retinue of servants, as beseems two noble princes, and go through the world till you find out who it is that steals my golden apples, and, if possible, bring the thief to me that I may punish him as he deserves.' His sons were delighted at this proposal, for they had long wished to see something of the world, so they got ready for their journey with all haste, bade their father farewell, and left the town.

The youngest Prince was much disappointed that he too was not sent out on his travels; but his father wouldn't hear of his going, for he had always been looked upon as the stupid one of the family, and the King was afraid of something happening to him. But the Prince begged and implored so long, that at last his father consented to let him go, and furnished him with gold and silver as he had done his brothers. But he gave him the most wretched horse in his stable, because the foolish youth hadn't asked for a

better. So he too set out on his journey to secure the thief, amid the jeers and laughter of the whole court and town.

His path led him first through a wood, and he hadn't gone very far when he met a lean-looking wolf who stood still as he approached. The Prince asked him if he were hungry, and when the wolf said he was, he got down from his horse and said, 'If you are really as you say and look, you may take my horse and eat it.'

The wolf didn't wait to have the offer repeated, but set to work, and soon made an end of the poor beast. When the Prince saw how different the wolf looked when he had finished his meal, he said to him, 'Now, my friend, since you have eaten up my horse, and I have such a long way to go, that, with the best will in the world, I couldn't manage it on foot, the least you can do for me is to act as my horse and to take me on your back.'

'Most certainly,' said the wolf, and, letting the Prince mount him, he trotted gaily through the wood. After they had gone a little way he turned round and asked his rider where he wanted to go to, and the Prince proceeded to tell him the whole story of the golden apples that had been stolen out of the King's garden, and how his other two brothers had set forth with many followers to find the thief. When he had finished his story, the wolf, who was in reality no wolf but a mighty magician, said he thought he could tell him who the thief was, and could help him to secure him. 'There lives,' he said, 'in a neighbouring country, a mighty emperor who has a beautiful golden bird in a cage, and this is the creature who steals the golden apples, but it flies so fast that it is impossible to catch it at its theft. You must slip into the Emperor's palace by night and steal the bird with the cage; but be very careful not to touch the walls as you go out.'

The following night the Prince stole into the Emperor's palace, and found the bird in its cage as the wolf had told him he would. He took hold of it carefully, but in spite of all his caution he touched the wall in trying to pass by some sleeping watchmen. They awoke at once, and, seizing him, beat him and put him into chains. Next day he was led before the Emperor, who at once condemned him to death and to be thrown into a dark dungeon till the day of his execution arrived.

The wolf, who, of course, knew by his magic arts all that had happened to the Prince, turned himself at once into a mighty monarch with a large train of followers, and proceeded to the Court of the Emperor, where he was received with every show of honour. The Emperor and he conversed on many subjects, and, among other things, the stranger asked his host if he had many slaves. The Emperor told him he had more than he knew what to do with, and that a new one had been captured that very night for trying to steal his magic bird, but that as he had already more than enough to feed and support, he was going to have this last captive hanged next morning.

'He must have been a most daring thief,' said the King, 'to try and steal the magic bird, for depend upon it the creature must have been well guarded. I would really like to see this bold rascal.' 'By all means,' said the Emperor; and he himself led his guest down to the dungeon where the unfortunate Prince was kept prisoner. When the Emperor stepped out of the cell with the King, the latter turned to him and said, 'Most mighty Emperor, I have been much disappointed. I had thought to find a powerful robber, and instead of that I have seen the most miserable creature I can imagine. Hanging is far too good for him. If I had to sentence him I should make him perform some very difficult task, under pain of death. If he did it so much the

better for you, and if he didn't, matters would just be as they are now and he could still be hanged.' 'Your counsel,' said the Emperor, 'is excellent, and, as it happens, I've got the very thing for him to do. My nearest neighbour, who is also a mighty Emperor, possesses a golden horse which he guards most carefully. The prisoner shall be told to steal this horse and bring it to me.'

The Prince was then let out of his dungeon, and told his life would be spared if he succeeded in bringing the golden horse to the Emperor. He did not feel very elated at this announcement, for he did not know how in the world he was to set about the task, and he started on his way weeping bitterly, and wondering what had made him leave his father's house and kingdom. But before he had gone far his friend the wolf stood before him and said, 'Dear Prince, why are you so cast down? It is true you didn't succeed in catching the bird; but don't let that discourage you, for this time you will be all the more careful, and will doubtless catch the horse.' With these and like words the wolf comforted the Prince, and warned him specially not to touch the wall or let the horse touch it as he led it out, or he would fail in the same way as he had done with the bird.

After a somewhat lengthy journey the Prince and the wolf came to the kingdom ruled over by the Emperor who possessed the golden horse. One evening late they reached the capital, and the wolf advised the Prince to set to work at once, before their presence in the city had aroused the watchfulness of the guards. They slipped unnoticed into the Emperor's stables and into the very place where there were the most guards, for there the wolf rightly surmised they would find the horse. When they came to a certain inner door the wolf told the Prince to remain outside, while he went in. In a short time he returned and said, 'My dear Prince, the horse is most securely watched, but I have

bewitched all the guards, and if you will only be careful not to touch the wall yourself, or let the horse touch it as you go out, there is no danger and the game is yours. The Prince, who had made up his mind to be more than cautious this time, went cheerfully to work. He found all the guards fast asleep, and, slipping into the horse's stall, he seized it by the bridle and led it out; but, unfortunately, before they had got quite clear of the stables a gadfly stung the horse and caused it to switch its tail, whereby it touched the wall. In a moment all the guards awoke, seized the Prince and beat him mercilessly with their horse-whips, after which they bound him with chains, and flung him into a dungeon. Next morning they brought him before the Emperor, who treated him exactly as the King with the golden bird had done, and commanded him to be beheaded on the following day.

When the wolf-magician saw that the Prince had failed this time too, he transformed himself again into a mighty king, and proceeded with an even more gorgeous retinue than the first time to the Court of the Emperor. He was courteously received and entertained, and once more after dinner he led the conversation on to the subject of slaves, and in the course of it again requested to be allowed to see the bold robber who had dared to break into the Emperor's stable to steal his most valuable possession. The Emperor consented, and all happened exactly as it had done at the court of the Emperor with the golden bird; the prisoner's life was to be spared only on condition that within three days he should obtain possession of the golden mermaid, whom hitherto no mortal had ever approached.

Very depressed by his dangerous and difficult task, the Prince left his gloomy prison; but, to his great joy, he met his friend the wolf before he had gone many miles on his journey. The cunning creature pretended he knew nothing

of what had happened to the Prince, and asked him how he had fared with the horse. The Prince told him all about his misadventure, and the condition on which the Emperor had promised to spare his life. Then the wolf reminded him that he had twice got him out of prison, and that if he would only trust in him, and do exactly as he told him, he would certainly succeed in this last undertaking. Thereupon they bent their steps towards the sea, which stretched out before them, as far as their eyes could see, all the waves dancing and glittering in the bright sunshine. 'Now,' continued the wolf, 'I am going to turn myself into a boat full of the most beautiful silken merchandise, and you must jump boldly into the boat, and steer with my tail in your hand right out into the open sea. You will soon come upon the golden mermaid. Whatever you do, don't follow her if she calls you, but on the contrary say to her, "The buyer comes to the seller, not the seller to the buyer." After which you must steer towards the land, and she will follow you, for she won't be able to resist the beautiful wares you have on board your ship.'

The Prince promised faithfully to do all he had been told, whereupon the wolf changed himself into a ship full of most exquisite silks, of every shade and colour imaginable. The astonished Prince stepped into the boat, and, holding the wolf's tail in his hand, he steered boldly out into the open sea, where the sun was gilding the blue waves with its golden rays. Soon he saw the golden mermaid swimming near the ship, beckoning and calling to him to follow her; but, mindful of the wolf's warning, he told her in a loud voice that if she wished to buy anything she must come to him. With these words he turned his magic ship round and steered back towards the land. The mermaid called out to him to stand still, but he refused to listen to her and never paused till he reached the sand of the shore. Here he stopped and waited for the mermaid, who had swum after

him. When she drew near the boat he saw that she was far more beautiful than any mortal he had ever beheld. She swam round the ship for some time, and then swung herself gracefully on board, in order to examine the beautiful silken stuffs more closely. Then the Prince seized her in his arms, and kissing her tenderly on the cheeks and lips, he told her she was his for ever; at the same moment the boat turned into a wolf again, which so terrified the mermaid that she clung to the Prince for protection.

So the golden mermaid was successfully caught, and she soon felt quite happy in her new life when she saw she had nothing to fear either from the Prince or the wolf—she rode on the back of the latter, and the Prince rode behind her. When they reached the country ruled over by the Emperor with the golden horse, the Prince jumped down, and, helping the mermaid to alight, he led her before the Emperor. At the sight of the beautiful mermaid and of the grim wolf, who stuck close to the Prince this time, the guards all made respectful obeisance, and soon the three stood before his Imperial Majesty. When the Emperor heard from the Prince how he had gained possession of his fair prize, he at once recognized that he had been helped by some magic art, and on the spot gave up all claim to the beautiful mermaid. 'Dear youth,' he said, 'forgive me for my shameful conduct to you, and, as a sign that you pardon me, accept the golden horse as a present. I acknowledge your power to be greater even than I can understand, for you have succeeded in gaining possession of the golden mermaid, whom hitherto no mortal has ever been able to approach.' Then they all sat down to a huge feast, and the Prince had to relate his adventures all over again, to the wonder and astonishment of the whole company.

But the Prince was wearying now to return to his own kingdom, so as soon as the feast was over he took farewell

of the Emperor, and set out on his homeward way. He lifted the mermaid on to the golden horse, and swung himself up behind her—and so they rode on merrily, with the wolf trotting behind, till they came to the country of the Emperor with the golden bird. The renown of the Prince and his adventure had gone before him, and the Emperor sat on his throne awaiting the arrival of the Prince and his companions. When the three rode into the courtyard of the palace, they were surprised and delighted to find everything festively illuminated and decorated for their reception. When the Prince and the golden mermaid, with the wolf behind them, mounted the steps of the palace, the Emperor came forward to meet them, and led them to the throne room. At the same moment a servant appeared with the golden bird in its golden cage, and the Emperor begged the Prince to accept it with his love, and to forgive him the indignity he had suffered at his hands. Then the Emperor bent low before the beautiful mermaid, and, offering her his arm, he led her into dinner, closely followed by the Prince and her friend the wolf; the latter seating himself at table, not the least embarrassed that no one had invited him to do so.

As soon as the sumptuous meal was over, the Prince and his mermaid took leave of the Emperor, and, seating themselves on the golden horse, continued their homeward journey. On the way the wolf turned to the Prince and said, 'Dear friends, I must now bid you farewell, but I leave you under such happy circumstances that I cannot feel our parting to be a sad one.' The Prince was very unhappy when he heard these words, and begged the wolf to stay with them always; but this the good creature refused to do, though he thanked the Prince kindly for his invitation, and called out as he disappeared into the thicket, 'Should any evil befall you, dear Prince, at any time, you may rely on my friendship and gratitude.' These were the wolf's parting

words, and the Prince could not restrain his tears when he saw his friend vanishing in the distance; but one glance at his beloved mermaid soon cheered him up again, and they continued on their journey merrily.

The news of his son's adventures had already reached his father's Court, and everyone was more than astonished at the success of the once despised Prince. His elder brothers, who had in vain gone in pursuit of the thief of the golden apples, were furious over their younger brother's good fortune, and plotted and planned how they were to kill him. They hid themselves in the wood through which the Prince had to pass on his way to the palace, and there fell on him, and, having beaten him to death, they carried off the golden horse and the golden bird. But nothing they could do would persuade the golden mermaid to go with them or move from the spot, for ever since she had left the sea, she had so attached herself to her Prince that she asked nothing else than to live or die with him.

For many weeks the poor mermaid sat and watched over the dead body of her lover, weeping salt tears over his loss, when suddenly one day their old friend the wolf appeared and said, 'Cover the Prince's body with all the leaves and flowers you can find in the wood.' The maiden did as he told her, and then the wolf breathed over the flowery grave, and, lo and behold! the Prince lay there sleeping as peacefully as a child. 'Now you may wake him if you like,' said the wolf, and the mermaid bent over him and gently kissed the wounds his brothers had made on his forehead, and the Prince awoke, and you may imagine how delighted he was to find his beautiful mermaid beside him, though he felt a little depressed when he thought of the loss of the golden bird and the golden horse. After a time the wolf, who had likewise fallen on the Prince's neck, advised them

to continue their journey, and once more the Prince and his lovely bride mounted on the faithful beast's back.

The King's joy was great when he embraced his youngest son, for he had long since despaired of his return. He received the wolf and the beautiful golden mermaid most cordially too, and the Prince was made to tell his adventures all over from the beginning. The poor old father grew very sad when he heard of the shameful conduct of his elder sons, and had them called before him. They turned as white as death when they saw their brother, whom they thought they had murdered, standing beside them alive and well, and so startled were they that when the King asked them why they had behaved so wickedly to their brother they could think of no lie, but confessed at once that they had slain the young Prince in order to obtain possession of the golden horse and the golden bird. Their father's wrath knew no bounds, and he ordered them both to be banished, but he could not do enough to honour his youngest son, and his marriage with the beautiful mermaid was celebrated with much pomp and magnificence. When the festivities were over, the wolf bade them all farewell, and returned once more to his life in the woods, much to the regret of the old King and the young Prince and his bride.

And so ended the adventures of the Prince with his friend the wolf.

Grimm.

The Mermaid Wife

This story is taken from *Folk-Lore and Legends.*

A story is told of an inhabitant of Unst, who, in walking on the sandy margin of a voe, saw a number of mermen and mermaids dancing by moonlight, and several seal-skins strewed beside them on the ground. At his approach they immediately fled to secure their garbs, and, taking upon themselves the form of seals, plunged immediately into the sea. But as the Shetlander perceived that one skin lay close to his feet, he snatched it up, bore it swiftly away, and placed it in concealment. On returning to the shore he met the fairest damsel that was ever gazed upon by mortal eyes, lamenting the robbery, by which she had become an exile from her submarine friends, and a tenant of the upper world. Vainly she implored the restitution of her property; the man had drunk deeply of love, and was inexorable; but he offered her protection beneath his roof as his betrothed spouse. The merlady, perceiving that she must become an inhabitant of the earth, found that she could not do better than accept of the offer. This strange attachment subsisted for many years, and the couple had several children. The Shetlander's love for his merwife was unbounded, but his affection was coldly returned. The lady would often steal alone to the desert strand, and, on a signal being given, a large seal would make his appearance, with whom she would hold, in an unknown tongue, an anxious conference. Years had thus glided away, when it happened that one of the children, in the course of his play, found concealed beneath a stack of corn a seal's skin; and,

delighted with the prize, he ran with it to his mother. Her eyes glistened with rapture—she gazed upon it as her own—as the means by which she could pass through the ocean that led to her native home. She burst forth into an ecstasy of joy, which was only moderated when she beheld her children, whom she was now about to leave; and, after hastily embracing them, she fled with all speed towards the sea-side. The husband immediately returned, learned the discovery that had taken place, ran to overtake his wife, but only arrived in time to see her transformation of shape completed—to see her, in the form of a seal, bound from the ledge of a rock into the sea. The large animal of the same kind with whom she had held a secret converse soon appeared, and evidently congratulated her, in the most tender manner, on her escape. But before she dived to unknown depths, she cast a parting glance at the wretched Shetlander, whose despairing looks excited in her breast a few transient feelings of commiseration.

"Farewell!" said she to him, "and may all good attend you. I loved you very well when I resided upon earth, but I always loved my first husband much better."

The Mermaid and the Boy

Long, long ago, there lived a king who ruled over a country by the sea. When he had been married about a year, some of his subjects, inhabiting a distant group of islands, revolted against his laws, and it became needful for him to leave his wife and go in person to settle their disputes. The queen feared that some ill would come of it, and implored him to stay at home, but he told her that nobody could do his work for him, and the next morning the sails were spread, and the king started on his voyage.

The vessel had not gone very far when she ran upon a rock, and stuck so fast in a cleft that the strength of the whole crew could not get her off again. To make matters worse, the wind was rising too, and it was quite plain that in a few hours the ship would be dashed to pieces and everybody would be drowned, when suddenly the form of a mermaid was seen dancing on the waves which threatened every moment to overwhelm them.

'There is only one way to free yourselves,' she said to the king, bobbing up and down in the water as she spoke, 'and that is to give me your solemn word that you will deliver to me the first child that is born to you.'

The king hesitated at this proposal. He hoped that some day he might have children in his home, and the thought that he must yield up the heir to his crown was very bitter to him; but just then a huge wave broke with great force on the ship's side, and his men fell on their knees and entreated him to save them.

So he promised, and this time a wave lifted the vessel clean off the rocks, and she was in the open sea once more.

The affairs of the islands took longer to settle than the king had expected, and some months passed away before he returned to his palace. In his absence a son had been born to him, and so great was his joy that he quite forgot the mermaid and the price he had paid for the safety of his ship. But as the years went on, and the baby grew into a fine big boy, the remembrance of it came back, and one day he told the queen the whole story. From that moment the happiness of both their lives was ruined. Every night they went to bed wondering if they should find his room empty in the morning, and every day they kept him by their sides, expecting him to be snatched away before their very eyes.

At last the king felt that this state of things could not continue, and he said to his wife:

'After all, the most foolish thing in the world one can do is to keep the boy here in exactly the place in which the mermaid will seek him. Let us give him food and send him on his travels, and perhaps, if the mermaid ever blocs come to seek him, she may be content with some other child.' And the queen agreed that his plan seemed the wisest.

So the boy was called, and his father told him the story of the voyage, as he had told his mother before him. The prince listened eagerly, and was delighted to think that he was to go away all by himself to see the world, and was not in the least frightened; for though he was now sixteen, he had scarcely been allowed to walk alone beyond the palace gardens. He began busily to make his preparations, and took off his smart velvet coat, putting on instead one of green cloth, while he refused a beautiful bag which the queen offered him to hold his food, and slung a leather knapsack over his shoulders instead, just as he had seen other travellers do. Then he bade farewell to his parents and went his way.

All through the day he walked, watching with interest the strange birds and animals that darted across his path in the forest or peeped at him from behind a bush. But as evening drew on he became tired, and looked about as he walked for some place where he could sleep. At length he reached a soft mossy bank under a tree, and was just about to stretch himself out on it, when a fearful roar made him start and tremble all over. In another moment something passed swiftly through the air and a lion stood before him.

'What are you doing here?' asked the lion, his eyes glaring fiercely at the boy.

'I am flying from the mermaid,' the prince answered, in a quaking voice.

'Give me some food then,' said the lion, 'it is past my supper time, and I am very hungry.'

The boy was so thankful that the lion did not want to eat him, that he gladly picked up his knapsack which lay on the ground, and held out some bread and a flask of wine.

'I feel better now,' said the lion when he had done, 'so now I shall go to sleep on this nice soft moss, and if you like you can lie down beside me.' So the boy and the lion slept soundly side by side, till the sun rose.

'I must be off now,' remarked the lion, shaking the boy as he spoke; 'but cut off the tip of my ear, and keep it carefully, and if you are in any danger just wish yourself a lion and you will become one on the spot. One good turn deserves another, you know.'

The prince thanked him for his kindness, and did as he was bid, and the two then bade each other farewell.

'I wonder how it feels to be a lion,' thought the boy, after he had gone a little way; and he took out the tip of the ear from the breast of his jacket and wished with all his might. In an instant his head had swollen to several times its usual size, and his neck seemed very hot and heavy; and, somehow, his hands became paws, and his skin grew hairy and yellow. But what pleased him most was his long tail with a tuft at the end, which he lashed and switched proudly. 'I like being a lion very much,' he said to himself, and trotted gaily along the road.

After a while, however, he got tired of walking in this unaccustomed way—it made his back ache and his front paws felt sore. So he wished himself a boy again, and in the twinkling of an eye his tail disappeared and his head shrank, and the long thick mane became short and curly. Then he looked out for a sleeping place, and found some dry ferns, which he gathered and heaped up.

But before he had time to close his eyes there was a great noise in the trees near by, as if a big heavy body was crashing through them. The boy rose and turned his head, and saw a huge black bear coming towards him.

'What are you doing here?' cried the bear.

'I am running away from the mermaid,' answered the boy; but the bear took no interest in the mermaid, and only said: 'I am hungry; give me something to eat.'

The knapsack was lying on the ground among the fern, but the prince picked it up, and, unfastening the strap, took out his second flask of wine and another loaf of bread. 'We will have supper together,' he remarked politely; but the bear, who had never been taught manners, made no reply, and ate

as fast as he could. When he had quite finished, he got up and stretched himself.

'You have got a comfortable-looking bed there,' he observed. 'I really think that, bad sleeper as I am, I might have a good night on it. I can manage to squeeze you in,' he added; 'you don't take up a great deal of room.' The boy was rather indignant at the bear's cool way of talking; but as he was too tired to gather more fern, they lay down side by side, and never stirred till sunrise next morning.

'I must go now,' said the bear, pulling the sleepy prince on to his feet; 'but first you shall cut off the tip of my ear, and when you are in any danger just wish yourself a bear and you will become one. One good turn deserves another, you know.' And the boy did as he was bid, and he and the bear bade each other farewell.

'I wonder how it feels to be a bear,' thought he to himself when he had walked a little way; and he took out the tip from the breast of his coat and wished hard that he might become a bear. The next moment his body stretched out and thick black fur covered him all over. As before, his hands were changed into paws, but when he tried to switch his tail he found to his disgust that it would not go any distance. 'Why it is hardly worth calling a tail!' said he. For the rest of the day he remained a bear and continued his journey, but as evening came on the bear-skin, which had been so useful when plunging through brambles in the forest, felt rather heavy, and he wished himself a boy again. He was too much exhausted to take the trouble of cutting any fern or seeking for moss, but just threw himself down under a tree, when exactly above his head he heard a great buzzing as a bumble-bee alighted on a honeysuckle branch. 'What are you doing here?' asked the bee in a cross voice; 'at your age you ought to be safe at home.'

'I am running away from the mermaid,' replied the boy; but the bee, like the lion and the bear, was one of those people who never listen to the answers to their questions, and only said: 'I am hungry. Give me something to eat.'

The boy took his last loaf and flask out of his knapsack and laid them on the ground, and they had supper together. 'Well, now I am going to sleep,' observed the bee when the last crumb was gone, 'but as you are not very big I can make room for you beside me,' and he curled up his wings, and tucked in his legs, and he and the prince both slept soundly till morning. Then the bee got up and carefully brushed every scrap of dust off his velvet coat and buzzed loudly in the boy's ear to waken him.

'Take a single hair from one of my wings,' said he, 'and if you are in danger just wish yourself a bee and you will become one. One good turn deserves another, so farewell, and thank you for your supper.' And the bee departed after the boy had pulled out the hair and wrapped it carefully in a leaf.

'It must feel quite different to be a bee from what it does to be a lion or bear,' thought the boy to himself when he had walked for an hour or two. 'I dare say I should get on a great deal faster,' so he pulled out his hair and wished himself a bee.

In a moment the strangest thing happened to him. All his limbs seemed to draw together, and his body to become very short and round; his head grew quite tiny, and instead of his white skin he was covered with the richest, softest velvet. Better than all, he had two lovely gauze wings which carried him the whole day without getting tired.

Late in the afternoon the boy fancied he saw a vast heap of stones a long way off, and he flew straight towards it. But when he reached the gates he saw that it was really a great town, so he wished himself back in his own shape and entered the city.

He found the palace doors wide open and went boldly into a sort of hall which was full of people, and where men and maids were gossiping together. He joined their talk and soon learned from them that the king had only one daughter who had such a hatred to men that she would never suffer one to enter her presence. Her father was in despair, and had had pictures painted of the handsomest princes of all the courts in the world, in the hope that she might fall in love with one of them; but it was no use; the princess would not even allow the pictures to be brought into her room.

'It is late,' remarked one of the women at last; 'I must go to my mistress.' And, turning to one of the lackeys, she bade him find a bed for the youth.

'It is not necessary,' answered the prince, 'this bench is good enough for me. I am used to nothing better.' And when the hall was empty he lay down for a few minutes. But as soon as everything was quiet in the palace he took out the hair and wished himself a bee, and in this shape he flew upstairs, past the guards, and through the keyhole into the princess's chamber. Then he turned himself into a man again.

At this dreadful sight the princess, who was broad awake, began to scream loudly. 'A man! a man!' cried she; but when the guards rushed in there was only a bumble-bee buzzing about the room. They looked under the bed, and behind the curtains, and into the cupboards, then came to

the conclusion that the princess had had a bad dream, and bowed themselves out. The door had scarcely closed on them than the bee disappeared, and a handsome youth stood in his place.

'I knew a man was hidden somewhere,' cried the princess, and screamed more loudly than before. Her shrieks brought back the guards, but though they looked in all kinds of impossible places no man was to be seen, and so they told the princess.

'He was here a moment ago—I saw him with my own eyes,' and the guards dared not contradict her, though they shook their heads and whispered to each other that the princess had gone mad on this subject, and saw a man in every table and chair. And they made up their minds that—let her scream as loudly as she might—they would take no notice.

Now the princess saw clearly what they were thinking, and that in future her guards would give her no help, and would perhaps, besides, tell some stories about her to the king, who would shut her up in a lonely tower and prevent her walking in the gardens among her birds and flowers. So when, for the third time, she beheld the prince standing before her, she did not scream but sat up in bed gazing at him in silent terror.

'Do not be afraid,' he said, 'I shall not hurt you'; and he began to praise her gardens, of which he had heard the servants speak, and the birds and flowers which she loved, till the princess's anger softened, and she answered him with gentle words. Indeed, they soon became so friendly that she vowed she would marry no one else, and confided to him that in three days her father would be off to the wars, leaving his sword in her room. If any man could find it and bring it to him he would receive her hand as a

reward. At this point a cock crew, and the youth jumped up hastily saying: 'Of course I shall ride with the king to the war, and if I do not return, take your violin every evening to the seashore and play on it, so that the very sea-kobolds who live at the bottom of the ocean may hear it and come to you.'

Just as the princess had foretold, in three days the king set out for the war with a large following, and among them was the young prince, who had presented himself at court as a young noble in search of adventures. They had left the city many miles behind them, when the king suddenly discovered that he had forgotten his sword, and though all his attendants instantly offered theirs, he declared that he could fight with none but his own.

'The first man who brings it to me from my daughter's room,' cried he, 'shall not only have her to wife, but after my death shall reign in my stead.'

At this the Red Knight, the young prince, and several more turned their horses to ride as fast as the wind back to the palace. But suddenly a better plan entered the prince's head, and, letting the others pass him, he took his precious parcel from his breast and wished himself a lion. Then on he bounded, uttering such dreadful roars that the horses were frightened and grew unmanageable, and he easily outstripped them, and soon reached the gates of the palace. Here he hastily changed himself into a bee, and flew straight into the princess's room, where he became a man again. She showed him where the sword hung concealed behind a curtain, and he took it down, saying as he did so: 'Be sure not to forget what you have promised to do.'

The princess made no reply, but smiled sweetly, and slipping a golden ring from her finger she broke it in two

and held half out silently to the prince, while the other half she put in her own pocket. He kissed it, and ran down the stairs bearing the sword with him. Some way off he met the Red Knight and the rest, and the Red Knight at first tried to take the sword from him by force. But as the youth proved too strong for him, he gave it up, and resolved to wait for a better opportunity.

This soon came, for the day was hot and the prince was thirsty. Perceiving a little stream that ran into the sea, he turned aside, and, unbuckling the sword, flung himself on the ground for a long drink. Unluckily, the mermaid happened at that moment to be floating on the water not very far off, and knew he was the boy who had been given her before he was born. So she floated gently in to where he was lying, she seized him by the arm, and the waves closed over them both. Hardly had they disappeared, when the Red Knight stole cautiously up, and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the king's sword on the bank. He wondered what had become of the youth, who an hour before had guarded his treasure so fiercely; but, after all, that was no affair of his! So, fastening the sword to his belt, he carried it to the king.

The war was soon over, and the king returned to his people, who welcomed him with shouts of joy. But when the princess from her window saw that her betrothed was not among the attendants riding behind her father, her heart sank, for she knew that some evil must have befallen him, and she feared the Red Knight. She had long ago learned how clever and how wicked he was, and something whispered to her that it was he who would gain the credit of having carried back the sword, and would claim her as his bride, though he had never even entered her chamber. And she could do nothing; for although the king loved her, he never let her stand in the way of his plans.

The poor princess was only too right, and everything came to pass exactly as she had foreseen it. The king told her that the Red Knight had won her fairly, and that the wedding would take place next day, and there would be a great feast after it.

In those days feasts were much longer and more splendid than they are now; and it was growing dark when the princess, tired out with all she had gone through, stole up to her own room for a little quiet. But the moon was shining so brightly over the sea that it seemed to draw her towards it, and taking her violin under her arm, she crept down to the shore.

'Listen! listen! said the mermaid to the prince, who was lying stretched on a bed of seaweeds at the bottom of the sea. 'Listen! that is your old love playing, for mermaids know everything that happens upon earth.'

'I hear nothing,' answered the youth, who did not look happy. 'Take me up higher, where the sounds can reach me.'

So the mermaid took him on her shoulders and bore him up midway to the surface. 'Can you hear now?' she asked.

'No,' answered the prince, 'I hear nothing but the water rushing; I must go higher still.'

Then the mermaid carried him to the very top. 'You must surely be able to hear now?' said she.

'Nothing but the water,' repeated the youth. So she took him right to the land.

'At any rate you can hear now?' she said again.

'The water is still rushing in my ears,' answered he; 'but wait a little, that will soon pass off.' And as he spoke he put his hand into his breast, and seizing the hair wished himself a bee, and flew straight into the pocket of the princess. The mermaid looked in vain for him, and coated all night upon the sea; but he never came back, and never more did he gladden her eyes. But the princess felt that something strange was about her, though she knew not what, and returned quickly to the palace, where the young man at once resumed his own shape. Oh, what joy filled her heart at the sight of him! But there was no time to be lost, and she led him right into the hall, where the king and his nobles were still sitting at the feast. 'Here is a man who boasts that he can do wonderful tricks,' said she, 'better even than the Red Knight's! That cannot be true, of course, but it might be well to give this impostor a lesson. He pretends, for instance, that he can turn himself into a lion; but that I do not believe. I know that you have studied the art of magic,' she went on, turning to the Red Knight, 'so suppose you just show him how it is done, and bring shame upon him.'

Now the Red Knight had never opened a book of magic in his life; but he was accustomed to think that he could do everything better than other people without any teaching at all. So he turned and twisted himself about, and bellowed and made faces; but he did not become a lion for all that.

'Well, perhaps it is very difficult to change into a lion. Make yourself a bear,' said the princess. But the Red Knight found it no easier to become a bear than a lion.

'Try a bee,' suggested she. 'I have always read that anyone who can do magic at all can do that.' And the old knight buzzed and hummed, but he remained a man and not a bee.

'Now it is your turn,' said the princess to the youth. 'Let us see if you can change yourself into a lion.' And in a moment such a fierce creature stood before them, that all the guests rushed out of the hall, treading each other underfoot in their fright. The lion sprang at the Red Knight, and would have torn him in pieces had not the princess held him back, and bidden him to change himself into a man again. And in a second a man took the place of the lion.

'Now become a bear,' said she; and a bear advanced panting and stretching out his arms to the Red Knight, who shrank behind the princess.

By this time some of the guests had regained their courage, and returned as far as the door, thinking that if it was safe for the princess perhaps it was safe for them. The king, who was braver than they, and felt it needful to set them a good example besides, had never left his seat, and when at a new command of the princess the bear once more turned into a man, he was silent from astonishment, and a suspicion of the truth began to dawn on him. 'Was it he who fetched the sword?' asked the king.

'Yes, it was,' answered the princess; and she told him the whole story, and how she had broken her gold ring and given him half of it. And the prince took out his half of the ring, and the princess took out hers, and they fitted exactly. Next day the Red Knight was hanged, as he richly deserved, and there was a new marriage feast for the prince and princess.

[Lapplandische Mahrchen.]

The Mermaid's Child

This story is taken from *The Flower Princess*, by Abbie-Farwell Brown.

In the rocks on the seashore, left bare by the tide, one often finds tiny pools of water fringed with seaweed and padded with curious moss. These are the cradles which the Mermaids have trimmed prettily for the sea-babies, and where they leave the little ones when they have to go away on other business, as Mermaids do. But one never spies the sea-children in their cradles, for they are taught to tumble out and slip away into the sea if a human step should approach. You see, the fishes have told the Mer-folk cruel tales of the Land-people with their nets and hooks and lines.

In the softest, prettiest little cradle of all a Sea-child lay one afternoon crying to himself. He cried because he was lonesome. His mother did not love him as a baby's mother should; for she was the silliest and the vainest of all the Mermaids. Her best friend was her looking-glass of polished pearl, and her only care was to remain young and girlish. Indeed, she bore her thousand-odd years well, even for a Mermaid. She liked the Sea-baby well enough, but she was ashamed to have him follow her about as he loved to do, because she imagined it made her seem old to be called "Mer-mother" by his lisping lips. She never had time to caress or play with him; and finally she forbade him ever to speak to her unless she spoke first. Sometimes she seemed to forget him altogether, as she left him to take care of himself, while she sat on the rocks combing her long green hair, or playing with the giddy Mermen in the caves below the sea.

So while the other sea-people sported or slept and were happy, her poor little Sea-child lay and cried in the green pool where the sea-anemones tickled his cheek with their soft fingers, seeking to make him laugh, and the sea-fringe curled about the scaly little tail which, like a fish, he had in place of legs. On this particular afternoon he was particularly lonesome.

"Ahoo!" he sobbed. "I am so unhappy! Ahoo! I want some one to love me very much!"

Now a kind old Stork was sitting on a rock above the baby's head, preening his feathers in a looking-glass pool. He heard the Sea-child's words, and he spoke in his kind, gruff voice.

"What is the matter, little one?" he asked.

At first the Sea-child was surprised to be addressed by a land bird. But he soon saw that this creature was friendly, and told him all his trouble, as babies do. "Tut tut!" said the Stork, frowning. "Your Mer-mother needs a lesson sadly."

"What is a lesson?" lisped the Sea-child.

But the Stork was busy thinking and did not reply at once. "How would you like a change?" he asked after a time.

"What is a change?" asked the baby, for he was very young and ignorant.

"You shall see," answered the Stork, "if you will take my advice; for I am your friend. Now listen. When next you hear a step upon the rocks do not stir from your cradle, but wait and see what will happen." Without another word the Stork flapped away, leaving the baby to stare up at the blue

sky with the tears still wet upon his cheeks, wondering what the Stork could have meant.

"I will not stir," he said to himself. "Whatever happens I will wait and see."

It was the Stork's business to bring babies to the homes where babies were needed; and sometimes it was very hard to find babies enough. Even now he knew of a house upon the hill where a boy was longing for a little brother to play with. Every night Gil mentioned the matter in his prayers; every night he begged the Stork to bring him a playmate. But though the Stork had hunted far and wide through all the land he could not find a human baby to spare for the cottage on the hill. Now he had a happy idea.

With his long legs dangling he flew swiftly up towards the hill; and halfway there he met the boy wandering about sulkily all alone. The Stork had never before spoken to this boy, because he well knew what Gil wanted, and he hated to be teased for what he could not give. So, though he had listened sadly to the boy's prayers, by day he had kept carefully out of sight. But now he came close overhead, and settling down stood upon one leg directly in Gil's path.

"Good-afternoon," he said. "I think I have heard you say that you wanted a little brother."

Gil was surprised to have a Stork address him like this, but he was still more pleased at the happy word. "I do! Oh, I do indeed!" he cried.

"Would you make a good brother to him?" asked the Stork.

"Oh yes!" answered the boy eagerly. "A very good brother I should be."

"H'm," said the Stork. "One never can tell about these boys. I think you are selfish and jealous. But a little brother may be a good thing for you. In any case, there is little for him to lose. Will you be so good as to come with me?"

Without another word the Stork flew up and away toward the beach, leaving Gil staring. This certainly was a most extraordinary bird! But Gil soon decided to follow him and see what would happen, for who could tell what the Stork's mysterious words might mean?

Presently, lying in his little cradle, the Sea-child heard the sound of feet scrambling up the rocks,—the sound he had been taught to fear more than anything in the world. It was his first thought to flop out of the cradle, over into the sea below; and he half turned to do so. But in a moment he remembered the Stork's last words, and although he was trembling with fear he remained where he was.

Soon over the top of the rock peered the face of the boy, Gil of the hill cottage, looking straight down into the pool where the Sea-baby lay snugly on the seaweed.

"Oh!" cried the boy, with round black eyes fixed upon the baby's round blue ones. "Oh!" cried the Sea-child. And it would be hard to say which of the two was more astonished. For to a Sea-child the sight of a clothed, two-legged land-boy is quite as strange as a naked little fish-tailed infant is to a human. But after the first look neither felt afraid, in spite of the terrible tales which each had heard of the other's kind. They stared wistfully at each other, not knowing what to do next, until the Stork came forward and spoke wise words.

"You, land-boy Gil," he said, "you want a little brother, do you not?" Gil nodded. "And you, Sea-child, want some one

to love you? I think I can manage to please you both. But first you must kiss each other."

Gil hesitated. He was a big boy of five or six, too old for kissing. Moreover the Sea-child looked cold and wet and somewhat fishy. But already the red lips of the little fellow were pouted into a round O, and the sad blue eyes were looking up at him so pleadingly that Gil bent low over the watery cradle. Then two little soft arms went about his neck, and Gil felt the heart of the Sea-child thump happily against his own.

"Very good," said the Stork approvingly.

The Sea-child could not stand, on account of having no feet, but he lay in his pool holding Gil's hand.

"Now the change is coming," went on the Stork, and as he spoke the baby began to fall asleep. "In twelve hours," he said to Gil, "he will become a tiny human child, and I shall carry him to the house on the hill, where he will find a loving family awaiting him. Look! Already he is losing the uniform of the sea," and he pointed at the Sea-child's fishy tail. Sure enough, the scales were falling away one by one, and already the shape of two little chubby legs could be seen under the skin, which was shrinking as a tadpole's does before he becomes a frog. "When this tail is wholly gone," declared the Stork, "he will forget what we have said to-night. He will forget his sea-home and the caves of the Mer-people. He will forget that he was once a Sea-child; and no one will ever remind him. For only you, Gil, and I shall know the secret."

"And I shall never tell," declared Gil.

"No, surely you will never tell," answered the Stork gravely, "for if you tell that will be the end of all. You will lose the little brother, and you will be sorry all the rest of your life. Do not forget, Gil. Do not forget."

"I shall not forget," said Gil.

Again they looked at the Sea-child, and he had fallen sound asleep, still holding Gil's hand. Now there was scarcely anything of the fish left about his little pink body; he was growing younger and younger, smaller and smaller.

"You must go home now, Gil," said the Stork. "Go home and go to bed. And to-morrow when you wake there will be a little brother in the house, and you ought to be a very good boy because you have your wish."

Gil gently loosened the Sea-child's hand and ran home as the Stork bade him, but said no word of all this to any one.

Now early in the morning the Stork came to the house on the hill, bringing a rosy little new baby which he laid on the bed beside Gil's mother, and then flew away. What a hullabaloo there was then, to be sure! What a welcome for the little stranger! Gil was not the only one who had longed for a new baby in the house, and this was the prettiest little fellow ever seen. Loudest of all cheered Gil when he saw the present which the Stork had brought. "Hurrah for my little new brother!" he cried. "Now I shall have some one to play with." That was Gil's chief thought: now he would have some one to play with.

They called the baby's name Jan. And from the first little Jan was very happy in his new home. He was happy all day in his mother's arms; happy when his foster-father came home at night and tossed him high to the ceiling; happiest

of all when Gil held him close and begged him to hurry and grow up, so that they could play together.

Little Jan did hurry to grow up, as fast as health and strength and happiness could make a baby grow. He grew bigger and bigger, handsomer and handsomer, the finest baby in the village, and his family loved him dearly. Every day he became more of a playmate for Gil, whom he admired more than any one in the world. Gil petted and teased the little fellow, who, as soon as he could walk, began to follow him about like a faithful dog. Grand times the brothers had together then. They dug in the sand on the seashore, and scrambled about the cliffs. They rowed out in the harbor boats with hooks and lines, and played at being fishermen like their father, who sailed away early and came home late. They grew bigger and sturdier and handsomer, and their parents were very proud of them both, the finest lads in all the country round.

The years went by, and during all this time Jan never dreamed the truth which only Gil and the Stork knew about the bargain made at the sea-pool cradle. To Jan, indeed, the sea was full of strange thoughts which were not memories but were like them. He loved to look and listen alone upon the water, or in the water, or by the water. Gil often caught him staring down into the blue waves, and when he raised his head there would be a puzzled look in the little fellow's blue eyes, as though he were trying to solve a riddle. Then Gil would laugh; whereat the wrinkle would smooth itself from Jan's forehead, and a smile would come about his mouth. He would throw his arm about his brother's shoulder, saying,—

"What strange thing is it, brother, that the old sea does to me? I think sometimes that I am bewitched." But Gil would only laugh again, thinking his own thoughts. It gave him a

pleasant important feeling to know that he was the keeper of Jan's secret.

Meantime what had become of the Sea-baby's forgotten mother? What was the pretty Mermaid doing in her home under the waves? She was learning the lesson which the Stork had meant to teach.

At first she had not greatly missed the Sea-baby, having other things to interest her in the lovely world where she lived. But as the sea-days went by she began to find the grotto which had been their pretty home a very lonely place indeed. She missed the little fellow playing with the shells and starfish on the floor of shining sand. She longed to see him teasing the crabs in the crevices of the rocks, or tickling the sea-anemones to make them draw in their waving fingers. She missed the round blue eyes which used to look at her so admiringly, and the little hands which had once wearied her with their caresses. She even missed the mischievous tricks which the baby sometimes used to play upon his mother, and she would have been glad once more to see him running away with her pearly mirror, or with the golden comb with which she combed her long green hair.

As she watched the other sea-children playing merrily with the fishes the lonely Mermaid grew very sad, for she knew that her own baby had been the prettiest of them all, and she wondered how she could ever have been ashamed of him. The other mothers were proud of their darlings, and now they scorned her because she had no little one to hold her mirror when she made her toilet, or to run her errands when she was busy at play. But the poor Mermaid was too sad to play nowadays. She no longer took any pleasure in the gay life which the Mer-folk lived beneath the waves. She wandered instead here and there, up and down the sea,

calling, calling for her lost baby. The sound of her sobbing came from the sea at morning, noon, and night.

She did not know her child's fate, but she feared that he had been captured by the dreadful Men-folk, who, so her people said, were ever seeking to snare the sea-creatures in their wicked nets. Day after day the unhappy Mermaid swam along the shore trying to see the places where the Men-folk dwelt, hoping that she might catch a glimpse of her lost darling. But that good hap never befell her. Indeed, even if she had seen Jan, she would not have known her baby in the sturdy boy dressed all in blue, like the other fisher-lads. Nor would Jan have known his mother in this beautiful creature of the sea. For he had quite forgotten the Mermaid who had neglected him, and if he thought of the Mer-folk at all it was as humans do, with wonder and with longing, and yet with fear.

Now the good old Stork who had first meddled in these matters kept one eye upon the doings in that neighborhood, and he had seen the sorrowful Mermaid wandering lonely up and down the shore. He knew it must be the Sea-child's mother, sorry at last for her long carelessness. As the years passed he began to pity the poor creature; but when he found himself growing too soft-hearted he would shake his head firmly and say to himself,—

"It will not do. She is not yet punished enough, for she was very cruel. If now she could have her baby again she would soon be as thoughtless as ever. Besides, there is my promise to Gil. So long as he keeps the secret so must I."

But one day, several years later, when the Stork was flying over the harbor, he spied the Mermaid lying upon a rock over which the waves dashed merrily, and she was weeping bitterly, tearing her lovely green hair. She looked so pretty

and so forlorn that the bird's kind heart was touched, and he could not help stopping to comfort her a bit. Flying close to her head he said gently,—

"Poor Mermaid! What is the matter?"

"Oh, oh!" wailed the Mermaid. "Long, long ago I lost my pretty little Sea-child, and he is not to be found anywhere, anywhere in the whole sea, for I have looked. I have been from ocean to ocean, from pole to pole. Oh, what shall I do? He is on the land, I know he is, and the wicked humans are ill-treating him."

The Stork spoke slowly and gravely. "Was he so happy, then, in his sea-home? Did you love him and care for him very dearly?"

"No, no!" sobbed the Mermaid. "I did not love him enough. I did not make him happy. I neglected him and found him in the way, till one day he disappeared, and I shall never see him again. Oh, my baby, my little Sea-child!"

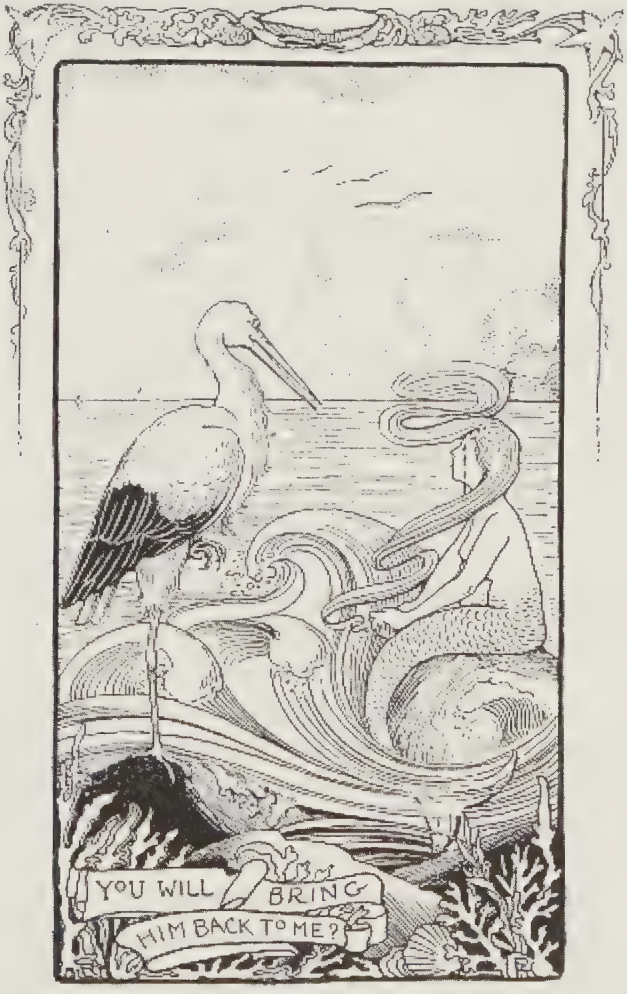
The Stork wiped a tear from his eye. "It is very sad," he said. "But perhaps it will comfort you to know that he is not far away."

"Oh!" cried the Mermaid, clasping her hands. "You know where he is? You will bring him back to me? Dear, dear Stork! I will give you a necklace of pearls and a necklace of coral if you will bring my baby to me again."

The Stork smiled grimly, looking down at his long neck. "A necklace of pearls and a necklace of coral!" he repeated. "How becoming they would be!" Then he grew grave once more and said: "I cannot return your child to you, but I can tell you something of him. He is indeed among the humans,

but he is very happy there. They love him and he loves them, and all is well—so far."

"Oh, show him to me that I may take him away!" cried the Mermaid.



But the Stork shook his head. "No, no, for you deserted him," he said solemnly; "now he has another mother in

yonder village who loves him better than you did. He has a brother, also, whom he loves best of all. You cannot claim him so long as he is happy there."

"Then shall I never see him again, wise Bird?" asked the Mermaid sadly.

"Perhaps," answered the Stork. "If he should become unhappy, or if the secret should be betrayed."

"Ah, then I must be again a cruel mother and hope that he may become unhappy," sobbed the Mermaid. "I shall look for him every day in the harbor near the village, and when his face is sad I shall claim him for my own."

"You will not know him," cried the Stork, rising on his wings and flapping away. "He wears a disguise. He is like a human,—like any other fisher-boy; and he bears a human name."

"Oh, tell me that name!" begged the Mermaid.

But the Stork only cried, "I must not tell. I have told too much already," and he was gone.

"Oh, then I will love all fisher-boys for his sake," sobbed the Mermaid as she dived down into the sea. "And some day, some day I shall find him out; for my baby is sure to be the finest of them all."

Now the years went by, and the parents of Gil and Jan were dead. The two brothers were tall and sturdy and stout, the finest lads in the whole country. But as their shadows grew taller and broader when they walked together across the sand, so another shadow which had begun to fall between them grew and grew. It was the shadow of Gil's selfishness

and jealousy. So long as Jan was smaller and weaker than he, Gil was quite content, and never ceased to be grateful for the little brother who had come to be his playmate. But suddenly, as it seemed, he found that Jan was almost as big as himself; for the boy had thriven wondrously, though there were still several years which Jan could never make up. Gil was still the leader, but Jan was not far behind; and Jan himself led all the other boys when his brother was not by. Every one loved Jan, for he was kind and merry, while Gil was often gloomy and disagreeable. Gil wanted to be first in everything, but there began to be some things that Jan could do better than he. It made Gil angry to hear his brother praised; it made him sulky and malicious, and sometimes he spoke unkindly to Jan, which caused the blue eyes to fill with tears. For, big fellow though he was, Jan was five years younger, and he was a sensitive lad, loving Gil more than anything else in the world. Gil's unkindness hurt Jan deeply, but could not make him love his brother less.

Both boys were famous swimmers. Gil was still the stronger of the two, and he could outswim any lad in town. As for Jan, the fishermen declared that he took to the water like a fish. No one in all the village could turn and twist, dive and glide and play such graceful pranks, flashing whitely through the waves, as did Jan. This was a great trouble to Gil, who wished to be foremost in this as in everything else. He was a selfish fellow; he had wanted a playmate to follow and admire him. He had not bargained for a comrade who might become a rival. And he seemed to love his brother less and less as the days went by.

One beautiful summer day Gil and Jan called together the other boys, the best swimmers in the village, and they all went down to the bay to swim. They played all sorts of water-games, in which the two brothers were leaders. They

dived and floated and chased one another like fishes through the water. Jan, especially, won shouts of applause for his wonderful diving, for the other boys liked him, and were proud of him, glad to see him win. This again made Gil jealous and angry. Jan dived once more and remained under water so long that the boys began to fear that he would never come up; and in his wicked heart Gil half hoped that it was to be so. For it had come about that Gil began to wish he had no brother at all. So different was he from the boy who made the eager bargain with the good old Stork.

At last Jan's head came out of the water, bubbling and blowing, and the boys set up a cheer. Never before had any one in the village performed such a feat as that. But Jan did not answer their cheers with his usual merry laugh. Something was troubling him which made him look strange to the others. As soon as he reached the shore he ran up to Gil and whispered in his brother's ear a curious story.

"Oh, Gil!" he cried. "Such a strange feeling I have had! Down below there as I was swimming along I seemed to hear a strange sound like a cry, and then, surely, I felt something cling close to me, like soft arms. Gil, Gil, what could it have been? I have heard tell of the Mermaidens who are said to live in these waters. Some even say that they have seen them afar off on the rocks where the spray dashed highest. Gil, could it have been a Mermaid who touched me and seemed to pull me down as if to keep me under the water forever? I could hardly draw away, Gil. Tell me what you think it means?"

Gil was too angry at Jan's success to answer kindly. He sneered, remembering the secret which only he and the Stork knew.

"There are slimy folk, half fish and half human, people say. The less one has to do with them the better. I think you are half fish yourself, Jan. It is no credit to you that you are able to swim!" So spoke Gil, breaking the promise which he had once given.

On the minute came a hoarse cry overhead, and a great Stork flapped down the sky, fixing his sharp eyes upon Gil, as if in warning.

"Why, how strangely the Stork acts!" cried Jan.

Gil bit his lip and said no more, but from that moment he hated his brother wickedly, knowing that the Stork was still watching over the child whom he had taken from the sea.

But Jan had no time to ask Gil what he meant by the strange words which he had just spoken, for at that moment several of the boys came running up to them. "Ho, Gil! Ho, Jan!" they cried. "Let us have a race! Come, let us swim out to the Round Rock and back. And the winner of this race shall be champion of the village. Come, boys, make ready for the race!"

Gil's face brightened, for he had ever been the strongest swimmer on the bay, and now he could afford to be kind to poor Jan, whose blue eyes were clouded and unhappy, because of Gil's former harsh words and manner.

"Ho! The race, the race!" cried Gil. "Come, Jan, you can dive like a fish. Now let us see how you can swim. One, two, three! We are off!"

The boys sprang, laughing, into the water. Jan needed but a kind word from his brother to make him happy again. Off

they started for the Round Rock, where the spray was dashing high.

The black heads bobbed up and down in the waves, drawing nearer and nearer to the rock. Gradually they separated, and some fell behind. The lads could not all keep up the gay strokes with which they had begun the race. Four held the lead; Boise and Cadoc, the lighthouse-keeper's sons, Gil, and Jan.

Almost abreast they rounded the rock, and began the long stretch back to the beach. Soon Boise began to fall behind. In a little while Cadoc's strength failed also. They shouted, laughingly, that they were fairly beaten, and those who were on shore began to cry encouragement to the two brothers, who alone were left in the race.

"Gil! Jan! Oh, Gil! Oh, Jan! Hasten, lads, for one of you is the champion. Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Gil was in high spirits, for he was still in the lead. "Hurry, little brother," he cried, "or I shall beat you badly. Oho! You can dive, but that is scarcely swimming, my fine lad. You had better hurry, or I win."

And Jan did hurry. He put forth all his strength as he had never done before. Soon the black heads bobbed side by side in the water, and Gil ceased to laugh and jest, for it was now a struggle in good earnest. He shut his teeth angrily, straining forward with all his might. But push as he would, Jan kept close beside. At last, when within a few yards of the beach, Jan gave a little laughing shout and shot through the water like a flash. He had been saving his strength for this,—and he had won!

The other boys dragged him up the beach with shouts and cheers of welcome to the new champion, while Gil, who had borne that title for so long, crawled ashore unaided.

"Hurrah for Jan!" they cried, tossing their caps and dancing happily, for Jan was a great favorite. "Hurrah for the little brother! Now Gil must take the second place. You are the big brother now!" And they laughed and jeered at Gil,—not maliciously, but because they were pleased with Jan.

Jan ran to Gil and held out his hand for his brother's congratulations, but Gil thrust it aside. "It was not a fair race!" he sputtered. "Unfair, unfair, I vow!"

The others gathered around, surprised to see Gil so angry and with such wild eyes.

"Gil, oh, Gil! What do you mean?" cried Jan, turning very pale. "Why was it not a fair race, brother?"

"Brother! You are no brother of mine!" shouted Gil, beside himself with rage. "You are a changeling,—half fish, half sea-monster. You were helped in this race by the sea-people; you cannot deny it. I saw one push you to the shore. You could not have beaten me else. Every one knows that I am the better swimmer, though I am no fish."

"Nonsense!" cried Boise, clapping Gil on the shoulder with a laugh. "You talk foolishness, Gil. There are no sea-folk in these waters; those are old women's tales. It was a fair race, I say, and Jan is our champion."

But Jan heeded only the cruel words which his brother had spoken. "Gil, what do you mean?" he asked again, trembling with a new fear. "I was not helped by any one."

"Ha!" cried Gil, pointing at him fiercely, "see him tremble, see his guilty looks! He knows that I speak true. The Mermaid helped him. He is half fish. He came out of the sea and was no real brother of mine, but a Merbaby. A Mermaid was his mother!"

At these words a whirring sound was heard in the air overhead, and a second time the Stork appeared, flapping across the scene out to sea, where he alighted upon the Round Rock. But Gil was too angry even to notice him.

"Gil, Gil, tell me how this can be?" begged Jan, going up to his brother and laying a pleading hand upon his arm.

But Gil shook him off, crying, "It is true! He is half fish and the sea-folk helped him. It was not a fair race. Let us try it again."

"Nonsense!" cried the other boys indignantly. "It was a fair race. Jan need not try again, for he is our champion. We will have it so."

But Jan was looking at Gil strangely, and the light was gone out of his eyes. His face was very white. "I did not know that you cared so much to win," he said to Gil in a low voice. Then he turned to the others. "If my brother thinks it was not a fair race let us two try again. Let us swim once more to the Round Rock and back; and the winner shall be declared the village champion." For Jan meant this time to let his brother beat. What did he care about anything now, since Gil hated him so much that he could tell that story?

"Well, let them try the race again, since Jan will have it so," cried the boys, grumbling and casting scornful looks at Gil,

who had never been so unpopular with them as at this moment.

Once more the two sprang into the waves and started for the Round Rock, where the spray was dashing merrily over the plumage of the Stork as he stood there upon one leg, trying not to mind the wetness which he hated. For he was talking earnestly with a pretty Mermaid who sat on the rock in the surf, wringing her hands.

"It is he! It is he!" she cried. "I know him now. It is the lad whom they call *Jan*, the finest swimmer of them all. Oh, he dives like a fish! He swims like a true Sea-child. He is my own baby, my little one! I followed, I watched him. I could hardly keep my hands from him. Tell me, dear Stork, is he not indeed my own?"

The Stork looked at her gravely. "It is no longer a secret," he said, "for Jan has been betrayed. He who is now Jan the unhappy mortal boy was once your unhappy Sea-baby."

"Unhappy! Oh, is he unhappy?" cried the Mermaid. "Then at last I may claim him as you promised. I may take him home once more to our fair sea-home, to cherish him and make him happier than he ever was in all his little life. But tell me, dear Stork, will he not be my own little Sea-child again? I would not have him in his strange, ugly human guise, but as my own little fish-tailed baby."

"When you kiss him," said the Stork, "when you throw your arms about his neck and speak to him in the sea-language, he will become a Sea-child once more, as he was when I found him in his cradle on the rocks. But look! Yonder he comes. A second race has begun, and they swim this way. Wait until they have turned the rock, and then it

will be your turn. Ah, Gil! You have ill kept your promise to me!"

Yes, the race between the brothers was two thirds over. Side by side as before the two black heads pushed through the waves. Both faces were white and drawn, and there was no joy in either. Gil's was pale with anger, Jan's only with sadness. He loved his brother still, but he knew that Gil loved him no more.

They were nearing the shore where the boys waited breathlessly for the end of this strange contest. Suddenly Jan turned his face towards Gil and gave him one look. "You will win, brother," he breathed brokenly, "my strength is failing. You are the better swimmer, after all. Tell the lads that I confess it. Go on and come in as the champion."

He thought that Gil might turn to see whether he needed aid. But Gil made no sign save to quicken his strokes, which had begun to lag, for in truth he was very weary. He pushed on with only a desire to win the shore and to triumph over his younger brother. With a sigh Jan saw him shoot ahead, then turning over on his back he began to float carelessly. He would not make another effort. It was then that he saw the Stork circling close over his head; and it did not seem so very strange when the Stork said to him,—

"Swim, Jan! You are the better swimmer; you can beat him yet."

"I know; but I do not wish to beat," said Jan wearily. "He would only hate me the more."

"There is one who loves you more than ever he did," said the Stork gently. "Will you go home to your sea-mother, the beautiful Mermaid?"

"The Mermaid!" cried Jan; "then it is true. My real home is not upon the shore?"

"Your real home is here, in the waves. Beneath them your mother waits."

"Then I need not go back to that other home," said Jan, "that home where I am hated?"

"Ah, you will be loved in this sea-home," said the Stork. "You will be very happy there. Come, come, Mermaid! Kiss your child and take him home."

Then Jan felt two soft arms come around his neck and two soft lips pressed upon his own. "Dear child!" whispered a soft voice, "come with me to your beautiful sea-home and be happy always." A strange, drowsy feeling came over him, and he forgot how to be sad. He felt himself growing younger and younger. The world beyond the waves looked unreal and odd. He forgot why he was there; he forgot the race, the boys, Gil, and all his trouble. But instead he began to remember things of a wonderful dream. He closed his eyes; the sea rocked him gently, as in a cradle, and slowly, slowly, with the soft arms of the Mermaid about him, and her green hair twining through his fingers, he sank down through the water. As he sank the likeness of a human boy faded from him, and he became once more a fresh, fair little Sea-child, with a scaly tail and plump, merry face. The Mer-folk came to greet him. The fishes darted about him playfully. The sea-anemones beckoned him with enticing fingers. The Sea-child was at home again, and the sea was kind.

So Gil became the champion; but that was little pleasure to him, as you can fancy. For he remembered, he remembered, and he could not forget. He thought, like all the village, that Jan had been drowned through his brother's selfishness and jealousy. He forgave himself less even than the whole village could forgive him for the loss of their favorite; for he knew better than they how much more he was to blame, because he had broken the promise which kept Jan by him. If he had known how happy the Sea-child now was in the home from which he had come to be Gil's brother, perhaps Gil would not have lived thereafter so sad a life. The Stork might have told him the truth. But the wise old Stork would not. That was to be Gil's punishment,—to remember and regret and to reproach himself always for the selfishness and jealousy which had cost him a loving brother.

The Mermaid of Druid Lake

This story is taken from *The Mermaid of Druid Lake and Other Stories*, by Charles Weathers Bump.

If Edwin Horton had not had a sleepless time that hot June night it probably would never have happened. As it was, after tossing and pitching on an uncomfortably warm mattress for several hours, he had dressed himself and left his Bolton-avenue home for a stroll in Druid Hill Park just as the dawn made itself evident. That was the beginning of the adventure.

Not a soul was in sight when he reached the driveway around the big lake, and he let out to take a little vigorous exercise, breathing in the fresh air with more enjoyment than had been his for some hours.

About half way around he stopped suddenly and rubbed his eyes to make sure he was not dreaming. For a curve in the road had brought him the knowledge that he was not alone in his appreciation of the early morning hour. Seated beside the water, on the rocks that line the lake shore, was a damsel—a rather good-looking one, as well as he could judge at the distance of a hundred yards. She was leaning on her left elbow and looking out over the lake in rather a pensive, dreamy attitude. Of course, young ladies don't ordinarily get up before dawn to go out to Druid Hill Park for the purpose of sitting alone beside the broad sweep of city water, and Edwin naturally felt some surprise at the novelty of the sight. Besides, she was inside the high iron railing, and he wondered how she had got there.

In the intensity of his interest he slowed down his pace as he drew nearer along the roadway. Should he watch her unobserved for a while to ascertain her purpose? Should he frankly hail her and ask whether she objected to company? Should he—well, the damsel settled his doubts for him just then by discovering him. She appeared startled, and he fancied she half meant to plunge into the lake. Then she changed her mind, gave him a bewitching little smile and raised her free hand to beckon him. Edwin needed no second invitation. The novelty of the situation was too alluring to resist.

In another moment he had scaled the fence and was clambering awkwardly down the rocks. And as he came close he found her a very pretty damsel indeed, with youthful, rosy cheeks, fetching blue eyes and long, light tresses that hung unconfined from her head down upon the sloping rocks behind her. She was smiling, and yet he thought he detected a renewed disposition to slip away from him before he had drawn too close.

Then he had a shock.

She was only half a woman!

The other half of her was fish—scaly fish—partly submerged in the waters of the lake!

He paused irresolutely. It was all right, you know, to read about mermaids in old mythologies and fairy tales. But to encounter one in this year of Our Lord, so near home as Druid lake! Oh, fudge! the boys at the Ariel Club would never get through "joshing" him should he ever say he had seen such a thing. It could not be true; it was too amazing! He was a fool to let his nerves get the better of him. He had better cut out those visits to the river resorts, or next he

would be seeing pink elephants climbing trees. First thing he knew he would wake up in that stuffy room at home. No, he couldn't be dreaming! There was the railing, and the lake, and the white tower, and General Booth's home, and the Madison-avenue entrance, and the Wallace statue and a dozen other familiar spots in a most familiar perspective.

And there, too, was the damsel in flesh and blood, or, rather, flesh and fish!

She was the first to speak.

"Good morning to you, stranger."

She spoke English—good, clear mother-tongue. Her lips were parted in that alluring smile, and her manner was as saucy as that of any fair flirt he had ever known of womankind.

"In the name of Heaven, who are you?" he stammered as he sat down, awkwardly, beside her.

She laughed outright—mischievously, mockingly.

"I? I am the nymph of the lake. Long years ago I was the naiad of the woodland spring that is now deep down yonder," indicating a spot out in the lake. "But they dammed me in and turned great floods of water in here, and mighty Jupiter gave me my new title."

"And are you really half fish?"

She laughed again.

"I am what you see."

As she spoke she gracefully swayed the lower half of her in the water. A million glistening scales prismatically reflected the increasing morning light. She was half fish, all right. There was no doubt about that.

"By gosh! here's a rum go!" muttered Edwin to himself.

"What did you say?" queried the mermaid.

"I said, if you must know, 'By Jove! you are a beauty,'" he replied, gallantly and impetuously.

The mermaid smiled again. The feminine half of her was pleased with the compliment to her good looks.

"I'm afraid you're a sad flatterer," she said, coquettishly. She lowered her blue eyes, then uplifted the lashes and looked full into his face in a manner that made his heart bound. One little finger was shaken playfully at him. Edwin seized the hand. It was warm; human blood pulsated through it! And as he held it his companion gave just a bit of a squeeze. A score of girls had done the same in bygone sentimental hours. But none so deftly.

"This is certainly an odd adventure," he remarked. "Tell me, lady of the lake, do you often sit here in this unconventional fashion with gentlemen callers?"

"What would you give to know?" she asked, teasingly.

"You are the first for a long, long time," she went on. "Last summer there was a man in a gray uniform who saw me, but he looked so uninteresting I swam away."

"When are you here?" he asked, earnestly.

"I love to sit on the bank when fair Aurora makes the dawning day grow rosy," she acknowledged, "but I have to flee to the depths when the full sun comes." She looked to the east. "It is growing late," she added, hurriedly; "I must be going."

"Not yet, not yet," he pleaded.

"Do not detain me," she cried; "I must go. It means life to me."

Gracefully she glided into the water at his feet.

"You will come tomorrow?" he asked.

The coquettish mood returned to her.

"Perhaps," she said, as with long strokes she headed for the centre of the lake. Edwin watched intently until she had gone a hundred yards and more. Then she ceased swimming, kissed her hand to him and dived under the surface as the single word "Farewell" floated over the water.

It seems superfluous to remark that he was in a trance that day. His father, at the breakfast table, jovially prodded him about being late, until he barely caught himself on the verge of telling his queer secret. And so absent-minded was he at the office that he found he had entered the account of a prosaic old firm as "Mermaid & Nymph."

Long before 4 A. M. the next day he was at the lake. The waning moon was still in the west and there were few signs of the coming day. For half an hour he kept his vigil alone, and had almost begun to think his piscatorial charmer was not coming. Then suddenly he espied her out in the lake,

swimming toward him. When about 50 yards off shore she hailed him jovially and bade him go around to the white tower. As he moved along the driveway she kept him company, maintaining the pace with graceful, tireless strokes and occasionally coming nearer to exchange a remark.

"What made you change the trysting place?" he asked.

"Love of change, I suppose," she replied. "A water nymph does not get much chance at novelty."

The half hour they spent upon the water's edge was largely one of sentimental banter between merry maid and enamored man, in which Edwin reached the conclusion that his charmer could give cards to the jolliest little "jollier" in Baltimore. She asked him about his past and present girl friends, and pouted deliciously when he frankly acknowledged them. Finally they parted, she promising to appear the next morning.

The third meeting started a chain of events. They were comfortably chatting on the rocks when Edwin heard the chug-chug of an automobile. The mermaid clutched his arm in alarm. "What are those horrid things?" she naively remarked. "They often make such an awful fuss I can hear them down in my cozy corner."

Edwin's reply was suspended while the machine passed them. The two men who were in it craned their necks most industriously at the sight of a pair of lovers out so early and seated in such an unusual spot for sentimental couples.

When he turned to make the explanations she had asked, he found it a harder task than he had imagined. Her knowledge of human inventions, of worldly means of locomotion, was

not extensive, and he had to begin with the A B C of it and go through a course in elementary mechanics. After the forty-second paragraph of instructions the damsel clapped her hands gleefully and cried:

"It would be great fun to take a trip in one!"

"It is great fun," declared Edwin, for a moment forgetting to whom he was talking.

"But then I couldn't do it!" she exclaimed in disappointment. "I couldn't leave the lake."

The unshed tears in her eyes made him ardent.

"You could do it if you are willing," he avowed, earnestly. "You can take the water with you." Visions of a tank lady in the "Greatest Circus on Earth" came to him.

"You are fooling me," murmured the mermaid. And she pouted.

Edwin rose to the occasion. "I am not fooling," he protested. "It would not be difficult to put a tank of water in the machine for you to put your"——He was going to say feet, but he ended his sentence, stumblingly, "your other half in."

In her joy the Lady of the Lake took his cheeks in her hands and gave him an impulsive kiss. "You are the loveliest being on earth," she said, enthusiastically.

That settled it. The rest of the conversation that morning was about automobiles, and when they parted it was with a definite assurance on his part that Edwin would be on hand the next morning with a motor car suitably equipped for her

use. It was only when he had gotten away that he realized the ridiculous side of the job he had undertaken. He could get an automobile all right. Tom Reese was a good friend, and a willing one, and his car had a tonneau capacious enough to accommodate the ex-naiad and her movable pool. But he would have to tell Tom the whole peculiar adventure to get him to take his auto out at such an unearthly hour.

"He'll think me clean daft when I unfold it to him," said Edwin to himself.

And Tom did, too. He laughed loud and long when Edwin chose what he thought to be a propitious moment and began his confession. "What are you stuffing me with?" Tom demanded, with tears in his eyes. Edwin renewed his explanations, only to bring on another explosion. "You'll be the death of me yet, old fellow," asserted Tom. "You'd better cut out those absinthes." Edwin added details most earnestly. "You're crazy, boy," was the only reply he got. He grew angry and hurt. "Now, Tom Reese," he demanded, "have I ever failed you when you wanted my help?" Tom apologized and began to study Edwin with intentness. "Look here, Edwin Horton," he said, "if there is any such girl at Druid lake as you describe, she's a 'fake' and she's got you strung mightily." Edwin swallowed this dig at his intelligence peacefully. He saw he had won. "All I ask, Tom," he rejoined, "is that you will take me out in the car and see for yourself." Tom gave him his hand. "I'm from Missouri, and you'll have to show me," he chuckled.

A wash tub from Mrs. Reese's cellar was requisitioned at 3 A. M. for use as a tank. After it had been lifted into the tonneau a hose supplied the needed water. "Climb into the water wagon," ordered Tom, and he threw on the lever and spun out to Druid Hill Park.

The day was still in embryo when the lake tower was reached. But the nymph was there. Her trim blue blouse was still wet after her swim ashore. The morning was summery, but Edwin had appreciated that the ride might be cold for the water lady, and had thoughtfully brought his sister's raincoat.

Tom's astonishment at seeing a bona-fide mermaid was balm to Edwin. The lad stood open-mouthed after Edwin had introduced them. In fact, he was so dumfounded that he failed to notice the hand the damsel had extended to him.

"Come on, Tom," said Edwin; "there isn't much time."

One on each side, the two boys supported the nymph as she cavorted as gracefully as possible up the rocks. They hadn't thought of the iron railing. "Caesar's ghost!" muttered Tom in dismay. "How are we going to get her over that?" Edwin turned to the mermaid. "If you don't mind," said he, "we will have to lift you." "I don't mind," she said, simply, "if you don't drop me."

At Edwin's suggestion he clambered over first, and then Tom raised the young creature boldly until she was clear of the iron spikes. There Edwin took hold of her and carried her to the auto. She was not a heavy burden, but her wet condition and her combination shape increased the difficulties.

From the moment she was once in the auto her joy was a pleasure to observe. She began by expressing her delight at their thoughtfulness in supplying the wash tub. When the machine began to move she clapped her hands in childish glee. From glee to wonderment her mood changed as they spun along the park roads. A hundred naive questions were asked about the objects unfamiliar to a lady whose habitat

was at the bottom of a big pond. Edwin answered faithfully, and had his reward in his enjoyment of her artlessness and winsomeness. Occasionally Tom looked round to share in it.

At a good clip the auto was run out Park Heights avenue and back. The dawn seemed most kindly disposed to the trio, for it was long in coming. And when they had reached Pimlico, Tom proposed a detour by way of Roland Park, to return to the lake across Cedar-avenue bridge. The damsel hailed it with glee, only stipulating that she must be back by "sun-up."

They showed her the turf tracks on either side as they bowled along Belvidere avenue eastward, and they were still engaged in explaining to her the methods of horse racing when Tom started down the long hill beside the Tyson place, Cylburn, leading down to the bridge across Jones' Falls. The girl was asking questions, with her bewitching face in close proximity to Edwin's, when there came a startling interruption to their fun. Tom, again greatly interested in the talk, failed to notice a large boulder in the road, and the auto shot over it with a jolt that caused him to lose control of the wheel. The big machine regained its balance, but not its course. Instead, it careened to the right and bumped into the ditch before the alarmed occupants had scarcely grasped their peril. Tom was tossed out on the roadway. Edwin was pitched into the front seat, the mermaid shot past him and fell on a clump of green turf and the tub of water upset, and, in seeking an outlet, poured over the car, drenching Edwin.

"Look out for a gasoline explosion!" shrieked Tom, raising himself from the road, apparently unhurt. Edwin knew he could do nothing to prevent such a catastrophe, so he followed the other two out of the auto as quickly as he

could. For a moment he and Tom paid no attention to the mermaid, so absorbed were they in the possibility of a blow-up. But when this danger had apparently passed they discovered that she had lifted herself from the grassy sward and was flip-flopping awkwardly in the direction of the brook that runs through Cylburn near the road.

"Come back! Come back! There's no danger!" called Edwin, as he started after her.

The damsel paid no heed. She was intent on getting to that stream of running water.

Again Edwin called, this time more sharply. The mermaid stopped not, but turned a tearful and much convulsed face to him.

Edwin raced after her. So did Tom. But when they got to the edge of the brook the only sign of her was an increasing ripple on the surface of a little pool. The stream was not so deep but that the bottom could be studied. And yet they saw nothing of her. Evidently she had the enchanted gift of being invisible in water.

Tom looked at Edwin. Edwin looked at Tom.

"That beats the Dutch!" said Tom.

"It's worse than that," replied Edwin, an odd catch in his voice. "We certainly have queered her for good. We must find her and get her back to the Park somehow."

For hours they moved up and down alongside the stream, calling pleadingly, but without response, for their quondam friend. Edwin made a little oration to her in absentia, in which he humbly begged her pardon and swore by all the

gods of Mount Olympus—by the great Jupiter, the chaste Diana and all the rest of them, as far as he could remember their names—that he would restore her safely to the lake. But she came not. Tom added his entreaties, but she heeded not. Then Tom suggested that perhaps she had worked her way down the brook and into Jones' Falls, whence she could, if she but knew the pipes, get into her beloved lake again. Edwin jumped at the idea, and, leaving Tom to look after the auto, hastened down the ravine to Jones' Falls, and moved up and down the Falls, calling for the vanished damsel with a fervor that might have caused doubts as to his sanity had anyone heard it.

When he returned, terribly downcast, Tom had gotten the car righted and had discovered that it was uninjured.

"No luck, I suppose?" said Tom.

"No," replied Edwin, moodily.

"Get in, then. We can't stay here all day."

Edwin required urging to leave the spot. Finally he consented to go. As he climbed in he saw the overturned wash tub, and his concentrated wrath and grief were heaped upon it. Picking it up, he hurled it savagely at a tree, and, when it fell to pieces with the concussion, he exclaimed, vehemently and inconsequentially:

"That's the blamed thing that got us into this muss!"

At Druid lake he insisted on another long search. Time and again the auto was stopped that he might call aloud for his charmer. But no answering sound came across the water.

"Curses!" said Edwin. "I'm afraid she's lost for good."

And that is probably the true explanation as to why there has been no mermaid in Druid lake since. She may be in Cylburn brook, she may be in Jones' Falls, she may have reached the Patapsco, but no one has ever seen a creature answering her description and aquatic habits since the damsel who once held the job got giddy and went motoring.

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